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JUNE, 1958

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ARGOSY

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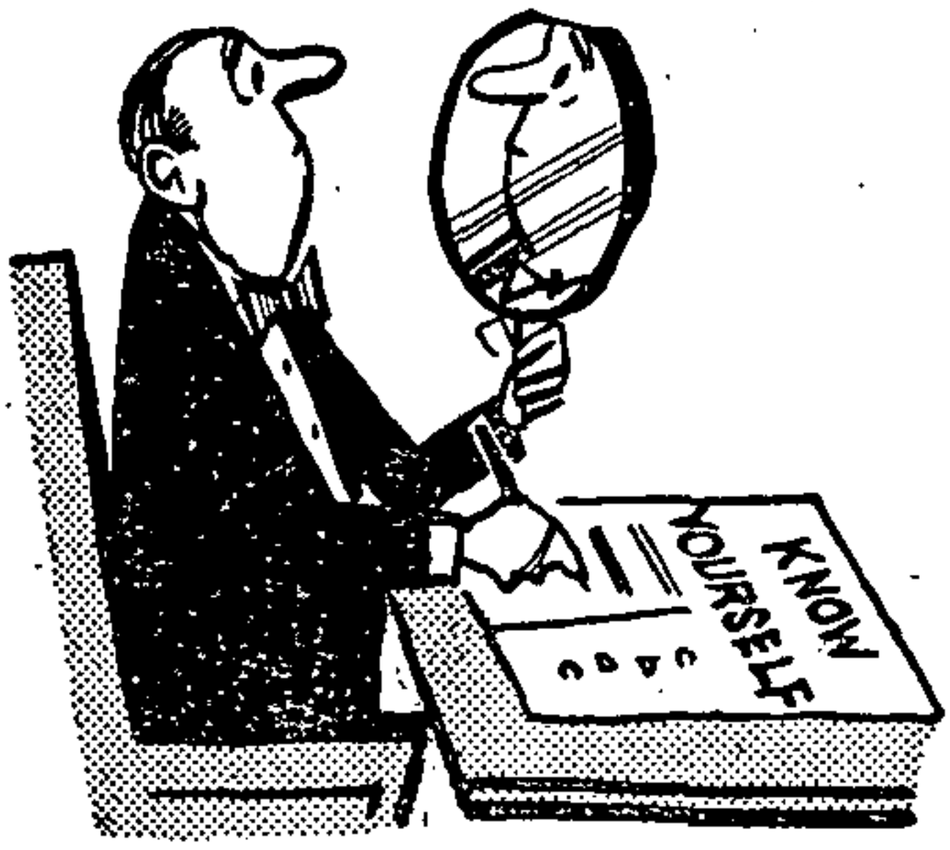


Log Book

OCCASIONALLY our attention is caught by one of those How Well do you Know Yourself? features in the ladies' magazines, God bless 'em, and it occurred to us that the beginning of summer would be a fitting moment for Argosy readers to take stock of themselves and come face to face with their innermost characters.

Accordingly we compiled a set of social predicaments, based largely, we don't deny for a moment, on situations in Argosy stories. Take pencil in hand, and note how you would act in each case, a, b, or c. Then turn to page 6 to know yourself as you really are.

1. "Saunders," says your boss, "the C.I.D.'s after me. They've discovered I've been embezzling from the firm for years, and I'm scarpering to Madeira. Stall them off for twenty-four hours, Saunders; remember I've always given you your annual five-bob increase." Do you:

a. Ring Scotland Yard the moment he's out of the office.
b. Persuade him to give himself up to the police.
c. Say, "Hang on, boss, till I pack my grip, I've always wanted a chance to see Madeira."

2. Your best friend invites you shooting in the bush. It turns out he is nursing paranoic suspicions concerning you and his wife, and proposes a stalking duel with elephant guns. He is the better shot. Do you:

c. Stencil spots on your face with the wife's lipstick and explain that you can't come out as you have measles.
b. Go out and let yourself be shot rather than put your friend's wife in an invidious position.
a. Slip a Mickey Finn into his early-morning tea before you set off for the shoot.

3. On a scientific mission getting mosses used in a drug to combat a world epidemic, you see and fall in love with a beautiful Palaeolithic girl frozen in a block of ice, who is worshipped by the local tribe as a goddess. You have no thawing apparatus and, if you could steal her frozen, couldn't carry both her and the moss. Do you:

a. Settle down as a member of the tribe.
b. Sadly abandon her and go back to save civilization with your moss.
c. Thaw her in a local geyser and abscond with her and a load of moss apiece.

4. You can foretell the future, and know that the six hideous girls who share your carriage in the morning train will win twelve thousand each in the pools next week. Do you:

c. Offer them collectively a fiver for next week's winnings.
b. Ask them for subscriptions to your Woollies for Wee Ones Fund.
a. Propose to the least hideous.

The Editor of Argosy persuaded **H. E. Bates** to write a book about "happy people." The result was *The Darling Buds of May*, in which he "dreamed up the happiest people on earth . . . the Larkins." Mr. Bates is now busy turning the book into a play. Act One, of course, finishes in a grand crescendo on the billiard table. Simultaneously, M.G.M. are making it into a film.

When Argosy asked permission to republish *The Haunted Policeman*, by **Dorothy L. Sayers**, her literary executor, Miss Muriel St. Clare Byrne, told us that research into the family history of Lord Peter Wimsey was a favourite hobby of Miss Sayers and her close friends. They studied family portraits, became experts on his ancestry, and argued about his coat of arms, so real had Wimsey become. After the successful run of *Busman's Honeymoon*—the play which Miss Sayers and Miss Byrne wrote in collaboration—Miss Sayers for her own amusement produced this last story about Lord Peter.

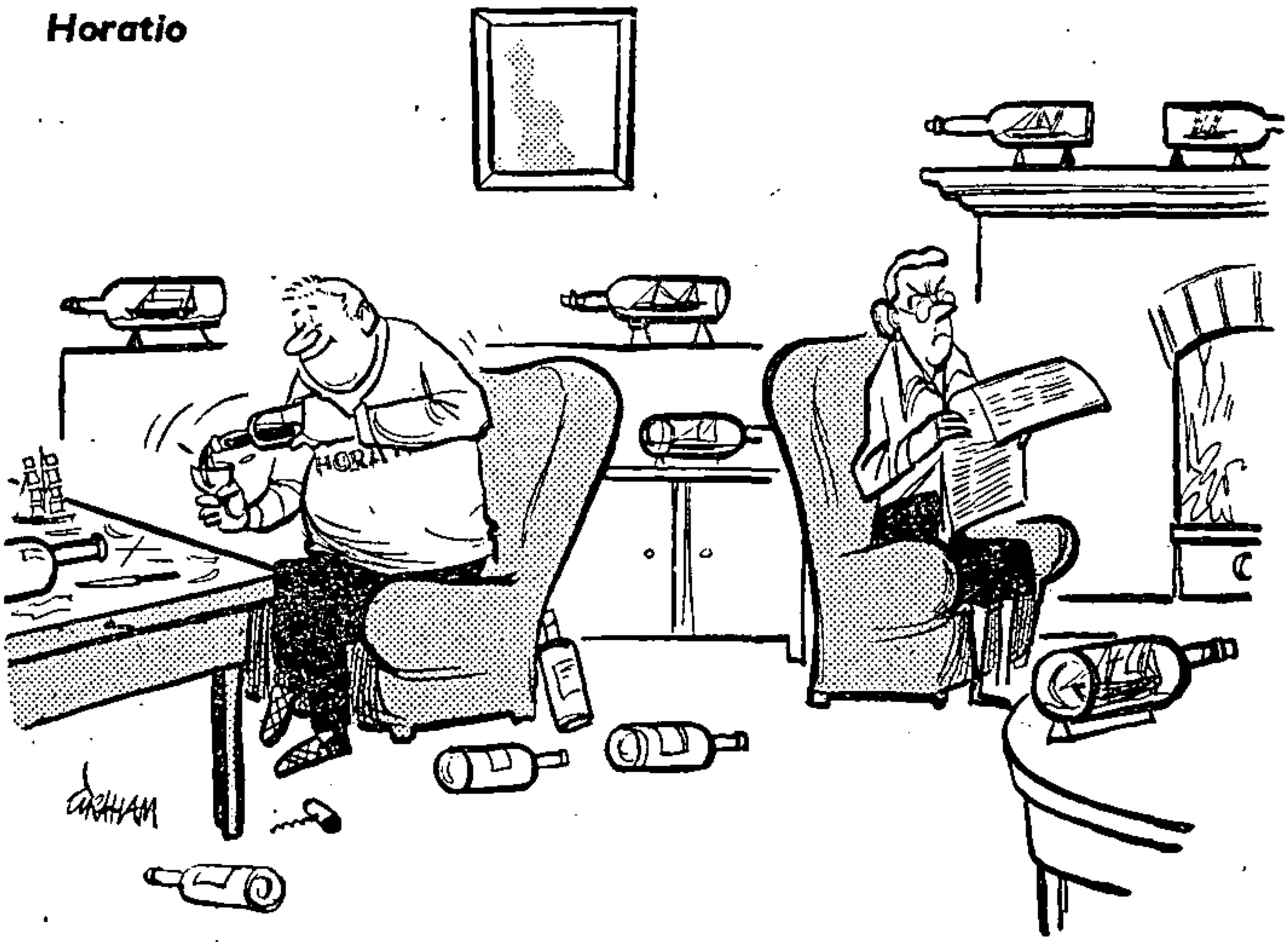
Know Yourself. If you noted your score on pages 4 and 5, these remarks are for you. *Mostly a's.* You'll get on all right in the world, but beware of over-confidence and avoid blackmail and stealing pennies from church collections.

Mostly b's. Frankly, you are dull through and through. We reckon you haven't been reading Argosy for long, or your ideas would be more enterprising.

Mostly c's. You have a lively, resourceful nature, and know how to turn a situation to advantage, and when to be philosophical. You sound delightful—the sort of person who has a copy of Argosy on board when the outboard motor breaks down.

JOHN SILVER

Horatio



MY GOLDEN BROTHER

" There isn't anything we couldn't do —you and me together "

BY BRIAN CLEEVE

I WAS uneasy about him from the first start of day. He was up at the crack of dawn, washing his ears and trying on his two collars, one after the other, to see which looked the best in the bit of mirror, although most mornings I'd have the pig and the chickens fed and the kettle boiling before he'd open an eye at me.

" What are you at, Con? " I'd said, watching him scoop water out of the bucket to plaster his hair down flat to his skull. But he wouldn't answer me. Only wink and grin at me cornerways, lifting his chin higher to admire the collar round his neck.

". Them that asks no questions will be told no lies, Jimmy boy," was all he'd say to me, the way the mother used to, God rest her, before Con and myself were left alone in the cottage. And he'd scarcely waited for his tea to cool, gulping it down the way it must have scalded the throat out of him, so he could be off down the path to Kilween, three miles below at the foot of the mountain.

I filled the kettle again from the bucket, so it'd be ready against the dinner-hour, and went to the doorway to watch him out of sight. His hair was drying again, and I could see the red-gold flash of it in the sun, and his whole body springing as he walked, as if every now and then the joy of being Con would take him and leap inside him. And I had joy too, just watching him.

You wouldn't find a brother like mine in the length of Kerry. Even in the bad days when there wouldn't be a brown penny in the house for tea or tobacco, he'd still be singing, and never a cross word out of him. Although another man would have had cross words enough, wringing a living out of fifteen acres of mountain land and a bit of bog, and a brother eight years younger than himself to mind along with it. But not Con. The heart was golden in him.

And yet, as I watched him down the mountainside this day, I felt uneasy, as if the shadow of the mountain was lying across

me and chilling me. I watched him out of sight, and he never turned once to wave, and that was unusual in itself. But it would be only a child would mind a thing like that, and I was turned fifteen, and nearly a man.

"Jenny," I shouted, "Jenny, come here, you old scarecrow, and up to the bog with us."

I fetched the loy—the big black-bladed turf-cutting spade—from behind the door, and went up through the near field towards the bog. Jenny, the ass, came out from behind the gorse clump, with a chew of gorse sticking out of her mouth, and some of the shadow lifted off me, and I felt better.

Next to Con, there isn't any creature in the world I love like Jenny. Brown on the back like an old blanket, and velvet-grey on her chest and belly like a grandfather's whiskers. And two big ears that switch this way and that when she's listening to you, as if they were saying all the time, "Yes, yes indeed, true for you, Jimmy boy"—although I tell you, if I say a word she doesn't agree with, she'll put those two ears of hers backwards and you couldn't lift them with a stick till I'd taken the word back again.

We went up the path together, Jenny crunching her chew of gorse at my heels, and the sun warm on our faces, and gradually ease came back to me. The farm fell below us until it was a pattern of green and darker green around the brown thatch of the cottage, the brown earth of the potato drills hidden by the green leaves of the plants. The only other colour was the yellow lick of flame from the gorse bush, and the red of the flowers that the mother planted under her own window a long time ago.

Down along from the farm other fields and stretches of untilled ground spread outwards, flattening gradually until they came in a ragged edge to the sea. And the sea blue as the sky above it, and far out, half hidden in summer haze, the grey-blue shadow of Inish Mor, the Great Island. You wouldn't think it anything great to see, maybe, and you visiting Kilween. But then, you wouldn't be standing on your own land as you saw it, your two feet planted on your own stretch of bog.

For me, there couldn't be grandeur like that view from our bogland in Rome itself. There's even a different feel to the turf under my feet as I step from Peter Meehan's stretch of bog on to our own. On to *my* own, if the truth be told. For while the mother left the farm to Con, she left the bog to me. And Jenny along with it, to carry the turf I won.

Long, curling, black sods of turf that would burn all night and greet you with a red, smiling ember in the cold of the morning. Peter Meehan's turf—you could wring the water out of it with

your two hands, and ten sods of it wouldn't boil a kettle. I spat on my hands and swung the loy, and tried to forget Con's strangeness entirely.

But he never came back for his dinner, nor for his tea either, and by the time the sun was making a long path on the sea I began to get worried in earnest. Because there wasn't anything he could be doing. It wasn't market day, and he couldn't be all day buying tobacco. I finished my tea and bread, and then went over to fetch down the savings tin from behind the loose stone in the chimney. If I could see how much he'd taken with him, I might guess what he was doing.

I pulled the stool over to stand on it, and took out the stone, and then the tin. And the second that I touched it my heart stopped. I knew without opening it that it was empty, and there had been better than two pounds in it the day before, that we'd been saving a long time towards the two pounds ten we owed for the rates. And now the lot of it was gone.

I put the tin back, and the stone after it, and stepped down to the floor almost without breathing. As long as I could remember there had been two sacred things in the house. The statue of Our Lady over the inside of the door, and that tin.

"While there's silver in that tin," the mother used to say, "you can hold your head up against the world. But let it be empty, and you'll be no better than a beggar and a vagabond, shaming your own name." And now it was empty. And worse than that, the rates had to be paid by Friday week, or there'd be trouble. We'd been late with them a few times before, and we'd had strong warning not to be late again.

I swept the crumbs out of the door and rinsed my mug in the bucket. Maybe he's gone down to pay them today, I thought. But he couldn't have, because there hadn't been enough. Two pounds three and sixpence, there'd been. Six shillings and sixpence short. When I went to look at the tin I thought to find sixpence or a shilling gone at the most, for tobacco. But *all* of it.

I felt cold round the heart, as if the cottage didn't belong to us any more. I hadn't felt that way since the mother's wake, with the cottage full of neighbours and strangers, and myself not knowing what would happen to me. And at last I couldn't stand it any longer.

"I'll go down and meet himself," I called through the door to Jenny. "Do you mind the cottage while I'm gone." I threw three sods of turf on the fire and took my stick, and away down the mountain with me in the shadows.

"He'll be at the next turn of the path," I said. But he wasn't. Nor the next, nor the next. Nor standing on the bridge with the

other fellows who lived nearer to Kilween and spent their evenings in the village.

I saw Peter Meehan and called out to him, "Have you seen Con at all?"

Someone sniggered, and Peter Meehan took the pipe out of his mouth and spat into the river.

"He won't thank you for coming down after him, Jimmy boy. Go away back up home with you, and leave him be."

"Leave him be!" I said. "But where is he? He's been gone all day."

The lad that had sniggered before let a laugh out of him again. "Is it his wife you are, or his brother? Does he have to tell you if he's going for a bit of a drink?"

"Shut up," said Peter Meehan. "Don't mind him, boy. Go back up home and Con'll be after you before you know it."

But it was what the other lad had said that reached me. "A bit of a drink?" I said. "Con doesn't drink at all."

And at that, two of the lads broke out laughing like an ass braying. "Well, he's drinking now, the way he'd been born to it."

"I don't believe it," I said, feeling the blood go into my face like a girl.

"Then go to Mrs. Ryan's and see for yourself," said one of them.

"Do no such thing," said Peter. "Away back home with you and don't mind them. They're just taking the rise out of you."

But I was down the road before he'd finished.

Mrs. Ryan's is a small grocery bar with a drink licence. Strangers, or people in a hurry, just stand and drink at one end of the grocery counter itself. But good customers, wanting a chat, go into Mrs. Ryan's own sitting-room behind the shop.

I pushed the door open, thinking I'd see Con at the counter. But the shop was empty. Just shadows, and a smell of candle-wax and potatoes, and rows of dusty tins and jars on the shelves.

I thought for a moment, with a kind of heave of relief in my heart, that they had been taking a rise out of me after all, and that maybe somehow I'd missed Con on the path, and that he was above in the cottage now, wondering where I was myself.

And then I heard his voice through the little glass-panelled door with its red curtain at the back of the shop.

"By God, that's a good one," he was saying. And a queer, cracked kind of laugh out of him that I'd never heard before.

I went softly round the counter and stopped with my hand on the door knob. I was suddenly afraid. And that was a strange thing, to be afraid of my own brother that was like a mother to me as much as a brother. I opened the door a crack, and what I

saw made me drop the knob out of my hand, and the door swung clear open, leaving me staring there into the room.

Con, in the big wooden chair on the far side of the hearth, with his hair on end and his face flushed scarlet. And Mrs. Ryan, like a fat white jelly, laughing at what had just been said. And Peg O'Riordan, a glass of whisky in her hand and her head thrown back, so that the lamplight fell like blood on her pale throat.

I stared at them, not believing my eyes. Peg O'Riordan turned as she heard the door, and stared back at me with her blue, glistening eyes. "By God," she said. "The little brother. Have you come to take him home, Jimmy boy?"

I looked from her to Con and back again. She was a byword in Kilween and further. All the O'Riordans were. Wild as devils, and the women worse than the men. And Peg more shameless than any two of them. A tall, handsome woman, maybe two years older than Con. Hair like midnight streaming to her shoulders. Strong and slender as a young rowan tree. She could cut turf like a man and carry in either hand a creel of it that would stagger a donkey. Although it wasn't much turf that any of the O'Riordans bothered to win.

When they were short of money on their ragged bit of a farm they'd take to the road like tinkers and go streeling off to Galway Races to beg or steal. No shame in them at all. I wouldn't have thought that Con would have passed the time of day with one of them. I just stared at her, like a rabbit staring at a ferret.

She laughed at my face and tossed the whisky down her strong throat. "Better go with him, Con, or he'll be telling Father Clancy on you, and you his white-headed boy."

"Divil I'd care," said Con, trying to drink his own drink the way she'd done. He choked, and laughed stupidly as it dribbled down his chin. I was cold from head to foot looking at him.

"Have you come to join the party, child?" said Mrs. Ryan, her chins shaking. "Your brother's in great form, cracking form. And isn't he the sly one? You'd think he was a girl to look at him in the street, blushing if you pass the time of day with him. And look at him now . . ."

I looked at him, and he stared back at me, blinking his eyes as if he couldn't see me clearly.

"Are you coming home?" I said. I felt sick that I should need to say it to him.

"Go 'way," he said. "Yer too young to be here. G'way home an' I'll be after you. Or maybe I won't be after you at that, eh Peg?" And the pair of them laughed as though he'd made a joke.

I turned and went out, leaving the door open behind me, and

as I stepped into the street I heard one of them closing it, and more laughter.

"Did you find him?" asked the lad on the bridge, and if I hadn't felt so miserable I'd have knocked him into the river.

I don't ever remember the path up to the cottage being so long. It was as if I was an old man climbing it. There was no moon and I stumbled as I walked, remembering the way Con's face had been, stupid and peering, with the yellow whisky dribbling out of his mouth, and his legs sprawling in front of the chair as if there was sawdust in them.

Jenny was waiting outside the door of the cottage as I came up, pushing her muzzle under my arm to be petted and to tell me that she'd been lonely, but I hadn't the heart to talk to her. I hadn't the heart to do anything. I went inside and lay down on my bed in my clothes, and stared at the dark ceiling.

We'd been so quietly happy, the two of us together, that I hadn't thought it would ever change. There hadn't seemed anything that could change it. As if the two of us were safe on our own land for ever, and the strongest wind in the world wouldn't blow us off it, or stir the thatch over our heads.

And even now, what change was there? I tried to tell myself that there was none. Why shouldn't Con have a drink if he wanted it, and if Peg O'Riordan was there, what harm in that? And the rates wouldn't matter that much. There were others worse than us for being late with them, and not a care on them how many warnings they got. We'd get the money somehow.

I told all this to my heart, lying in the dark, but it believed none of it. And I lay cold and shivering as if there was a corpse lying on the bed beside me.

But long as I lay, I was asleep before Con came home . . .

I woke with sunlight on my face through the small window, and Jenny crackling furze in her jaws on the far side of it. I came up in the bed and wondered why I didn't feel the spring in myself that I usually do on a sunny morning, until I remembered. I looked across at Con's bed, in a sudden terror that he wouldn't be in it. But he was, lying on his back in his boots, with his mouth open and snoring, one hand trailing down on the floor.

I blew the embers into a flame, put fresh turf round them, and lowered the kettle on its chain until it touched them. I made a noise doing it, on purpose, but he never stirred. He was still snoring when I'd seen to the pig, and was back wetting the tea.

"Con," I said, "wake up. Here's your tea for you." And even then I had to shake him.

"Whassat?" he said. "Wharramarra with you? Why you shaking me?"

"There's nothing the matter," I said. "Here's your tea only. Nothing the matter at all." And suddenly there wasn't. Wasn't the sun shining, and the two of us together again? Yesterday was just something bad that was finished and forgotten.

"There's nothing the matter in the wide world," I said.

"There berra not be," said Con, sitting up and then holding his head as if there was a sudden pain in it. I looked at it, but there wasn't a mark on it.

"Were you fighting?" I said.

"No," he said. "Give me that tea and don't be talking so much. Have you fed the pig?"

"Yes," I said.

"Then get up to the bog and leave me alone. I feel terrible."

He was asleep again when I came back for dinner, but he was up and dressed in his suit at teatime, and after tea he went away down the mountain without a word to me.

"When will you be back?" I called after him, but not very loud, and he never answered.

The next day it was the same, only it was after dinner that he went, without waiting for his tea. When I went out to see to the pig the sty was empty. He'd taken the pig with him to sell.

I stood there for a long time looking at the empty sty, and one minute I'd be turning to go down the mountain after him, and the next minute I'd be turning back again, thinking what was the use. He'd have it sold long since, to Mrs. Ryan or another, and the money would be half spent by now. I knew where he'd have gone. Over to Ballygrange, the big town beyond the mountains. It wouldn't be long he and Peg O'Riordan would take to make the money fly there.

I fell asleep on the stool by the fire, and the next thing I knew it was moonlight, and a voice singing outside. It might have been twelve of the night by the height of the moon.

"*I know who I love*," sang Con, "*but the de'il knows who I'll marry*." And there was the sound of him falling over a stone and laughing to himself as he nursed his shins on the ground.

I went out and found him lying in the moonlight, giggling up at the stars. I turned back in and fetched a bucket of water.

"There's an empty space in the sty for you, you drunken pig," I said, and emptied the bucket over him. He came up at that like a boxer, his fists stabbing the shadows round him, but he couldn't make out which of the shadows was me, and I stuck out my foot, and he tripped over it and fell again.

I dragged him into the cottage and heaped him up on the settle, like a pile of sawdust dressed in a suit. There were stains down the front of his suit where he'd soiled himself, and there

was grass and twigs and earth in his hair where he'd fallen along the path coming home. "Pig," I said to him, "pig," and with each word I struck him across the face, and with each blow it was as if I was striking myself.

"Stop it," he whispered at me. "Let me alone." And he threw his heart up into the ashes of the fire. "Don't strike your brother," he said when he could speak again. "Iss a sin, a bloody mortal sin. I'll tell Father Clancy on you . . ."

"My brother!" I said. "You're not my brother. I haven't got a brother. Only a drunken pig. How could you sell it?" I shouted at him in a sudden fury. "The one thing we had that stood to us? Bacon for the winter, a few pounds in the tin against the bad day—how could you sell it on us?"

"Isn't the farm mine?" said Con. "Didn't the mother leave it to me? I've the right to sell each stick and stone of it if I want to, and I tell you I will if you don't leave me alone. And the farm itself. The roof over your head if you don't shut up." He was standing toe to toe with me now, shouting louder.

"Pig," I shrieked at him again. "Go and sleep in the sty."

The next I knew I was across the kitchen with the taste of blood in my mouth where his fist had split my lips against my teeth. I lay where I fell, under the table, and in a second he was after me, kneeling beside me. "I didn't mean it," he said. "I didn't mean it, Jimmy boy. Did I hurt you bad?"

I didn't mean to answer him, but he pulled me up till my head was against his chest, and he rocked me the way he had when I was small, crooning and whispering, and suddenly I was crying against him as if I was a child again.

"Oh Con," I whispered, "Con. Why did you do it?"

"Whisht, child," he said, "lie quiet and sleep. What do you know about being a man? There's a madness gets into you. You'll feel it too when it's your time. A raging madness to be great. To hold the world in your hands and throw it up like a ball. And to hold a woman in your arms and put your mouth against hers. It's better than whisky, Jimmy boy, better than sunlight. And the rage for it is there day and night. I'd be seeing the girls going in to Mass with their eyes half shut and their faces prim, and their hands folded on their prayer books. And all I'd see would be their breasts, and the curve of their cheek, and the richness of their mouths. Then I'd come back to the farm and there'd be nothing but you, and the quietness, and the ass chomping outside, and I thought I'd go raving mad. It's a wonder you wouldn't have seen the madness on me at times . . . but then, how would you, and you still a child?"

"I'm not," I said. "I'm near grown."

He laughed, and we both stayed quiet then, the embers fading in the hearth and the moonlight travelling across the floor.

"Where did you go today?" I said at last.

"Ballygrange," he said.

"And what did you do?"

It was almost like old times, the two of us talking over the ashes, tired, and yet not wanting to sleep for a while yet.

"Oh, the day we had," he answered, his voice lifting, taking fire for a minute. And then it fell, heavy and tired. "But it'll be long before I have a day like that again. You wouldn't take Peg O'Riordan out and you without a pound note in your pocket to spend on her. And it's too much I've spent on her already."

I said nothing to that, but Con knew what my silence meant.

"You don't understand, boy," he said. "You don't understand. She's like drink to a thirsty man. Fire to a cold one. You feel your blood dancing if she so much as touches your hand. And the laughter in her. You'd wonder how you ever spent your evenings alone once you've spent one with her. But what's the use in talking? You'll understand these things yourself one day, Jimmy boy, and then you'll not blame me the way you're doing now. Let's get to bed."

The next morning there wasn't much talk out of either of us, nor for several days after. I was all day on the other side of the mountain, digging Father Clancy's garden for him and doing odd jobs, because that was the only way I could get cash quickly enough to pay the rates.

But I didn't bring it home with me, just in case. I left it with Father Clancy to mind for me. And Con guessed I was doing that and it put a shadow between us. On top of it he was having both our jobs to do on the farm, and it was leaving him tired and cross-grained by nightfall.

"Only one more day," I said on the Wednesday night, as we were going to bed. "I'll have the lot of the money by tomorrow evening, and a bit more. Maybe we could walk over to Ballygrange together," I said, "and go to the cinema? Peter Meehan was telling me there's a smashing cowboy picture coming."

"Ah, shut up," said Con, "you and your cowboy pictures."

We didn't speak after that, but I lay awake for a long time, and I knew that Con was awake too. I could hear him stirring in the bed. "Con," I said at last. "Con, are you still awake?"

He lay dead quiet then, not answering, and after a while I must have fallen asleep, still waiting for him to answer.

I finished early the next day, about four o'clock, and came back round the mountainside as if the weight of the world was off my shoulders. Three pounds in my pocket; and I'd get Con to come

with me to Ballygrange, and everything would be the way it had always been. I saw the farm spread out with its green pattern below the path, the brown stretch of the bog away up to the left, and the sea beyond. I hadn't liked to look at it while the money wasn't there to pay what we owed. As if it didn't belong to us any more. But now . . . I swung down to the cottage, looking for Jenny to come out from behind the gorse bush.

But she wasn't anywhere in sight. Nor was Con.

"Con," I called, "Con, where are you? I'm back."

But my voice lost itself in the fields, and the cottage stayed quiet as if it was dead. I went in, holding my breath, knowing what had happened and yet not wanting to believe it. His suit was gone from the nail above his bed. And he'd taken Jenny.

I didn't stop to catch breath. I was down the path, tearing, my boots skidding on the stones, and the sweat running into my eyes. Let me be in time, I prayed under my breath. Let me get there before he sells her.

It was market day down in Kilween: the day when the farmers from out around brought in any beasts they had to sell, and to buy their bits and pieces. But the market would be well over by now, and I hadn't a hope in my heart that Con hadn't made his bargain long since, and Jenny treading some strange road to a new master. I'll kill him, I thought. I'll split his head with a rock if he's done that on her. And then I hadn't breath left for thinking, only for running.

I passed the gang of them standing on the bridge, and one of them called after me, "Are you looking for him again?" but I didn't answer. I pelted up the street to the market square, round the corner, and then stopped short with my boots knocking sparks out of the cobbles and my heart coming up in my throat.

For there he was, leaning against a post, Jenny behind him nuzzling at his shoulder, and a small, thin man in old tweeds and gaiters talking to him. I could see from the way their hands were going that they were bargaining. I started running again, and they both looked round.

"Have you sold her?" I shouted. "Don't you buy her, mister," I said. "She's not his to sell. She's mine."

"Get out of that," said Con, his face filling red with anger. "Don't mind him, the brat. I'll teach him something when I get him out of this."

"You sell her," I said, "and I'll not be there for you to teach me. I'll walk out on you that same minute."

"And good riddance to you," shouted Con. "Aren't you like a stone round my neck with your crying and your snivelling? Go on with you. Walk out on me. Run out on me if you like. Just

let me see the back of you." There was a small crowd round us by now, and the man who had been bargaining for the ass turned away from us, shrugging his shoulders and laughing.

"Come back," said Con, "come back. You can have her for the three pounds. I'll not bargain any more with you."

"Will you put your hand to it before these people that she's yours to sell, and not the boy's?" said the man.

"Before God—" Con began, and in that moment he stiffened, and for a second I thought God had struck him for the lie he was going to tell. Then I followed his eyes.

Peg O'Riordan was coming down the street with a man on her arm. A big ox of a man who looked like a cattle dealer come to the market. Peg saw the crowd of us, and Con in the middle of it, staring at her, and she lifted her head and laughed at him down her nose. And then she looked up at the big man beside her, taller by a head than even she was, and preened herself like a cat in the sun, stretching her shoulders. It would have been the same thing if she'd walked over and struck Con in the face.

"Peg," he whispered, "Peg." He was like a man walking in his sleep. He went through the crowd without seeing it, and over to the path. "Peg," he said, "I'm getting money this minute. You won't leave me for a stranger, will you?"

She put out her hand and brushed him aside as if he was the hanging branch of a tree.

"Peg," he said louder, and caught her arm, shaking it, as if he couldn't believe that she'd really seen and heard him.

"Take your hands off the lady's arm," said the cattle dealer.

"You be damned," said Con, and struck him with the back of his hand across the mouth. For as long as ten seconds the dealer looked at him, wiping his hand across his mouth.

Then they were both at it, like terrier and mastiff. But it wasn't a fight at all. More like a murder, with Con banged from one side of the path to the other, and down again as soon as he was up. And all the while Peg watching, a kind of smile on her as if she could taste the blood. There was one last blow from the dealer like a mallet hitting a sack, and Con fell down at my feet in a heap. The dealer dusted his hands together, and crooked his elbow for Peg to take his arm. And she never so much as looked back at Con lying in the road.

Someone behind me sniggered. "Go away," I said. "Go away and leave us." But they wouldn't go.

"Take him in to Mrs. Ryan's," said someone else. "She'll mend him."

"She'll not," I said. "He won't set foot in there again. Help me up with him, Peter." And between Peter Meehan and

myself we got him lying across the ass, his feet hanging on the one side and his hands on the other, with my own hand to steady him in the small of his back.

"Giddap, Jenny," I said. And we went off up the road, across the small humped bridge, over the river, and then up the path leading to the mountain and our own farm. And with each step I felt that the stones of the road were tearing at my heart. Halfway up I heard Con groaning, and I helped him until he was sitting upright, swaying on Jenny's back, with one hand holding on her neck, and the other exploring his bruised face.

"Did he shame me, Jimmy boy?"

"He did not. It was just that he was too big for you."

He said no more for a minute, and there was no sound in the world but the tap of Jenny's hoofs and my footsteps.

"I've been a terrible fool," said Con, and suddenly I felt my heart lifting in a way it hadn't done for a long, sad time.

The sun lay dying on the sea beyond the Island, and the air was still and clear like water in a deep pool. High above us you could see the brown scar where I'd been digging turf and the yellow fire of the gorse bush beside the cottage.

"A terrible fool," said Con. "Have you got the money you said you might have, over and above the rates?"

"I have," I said.

"Then maybe tomorrow we could walk over to Ballygrange together," said Con, "to that cowboy picture?"

He said it not looking at me, as if afraid of what I might answer. But if he had looked at me he wouldn't have needed to be afraid. As he spoke, all the heart of the sun seemed to come out to us across the sea, and up the mountainside, to fall burning on the red-gold head of my brother, my golden brother, lurching up the path on Jenny's back, his feet trailing the ground.

"We could," I said, trying not to cry with the joy bursting in my breast. "We could. There isn't anything in the wide world we couldn't do, you and me together."

Jenny lifted her head and shook it, laying one ear backwards along the length of her neck, her step checking for a moment.

"And Jenny too, of course," I said. "The three of us together against the world." And the long, grey, velvety ear came upright, and she trotted forward again, her small black hoofs tap-tapping, neat as a lady's shoes on the road.

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An Irishman's heart is nothing but his imagination.

GEORGE BERNARD SHAW

GARDEN OF EDEN

I hoped I had chosen the forbidden tree

BY AUBREY MENEN

IN 1946, tens of thousands of men wearing beards and gold-embroidered skullcaps came to Bombay from all the countries that surround the Indian Ocean. There, at a great ceremony, they weighed their religious leader against boxes filled with diamonds, and when the scales balanced they made him a present of the gems.

In those days I was living at No. 63 Marine Lines. The back door opened on a large public space, and here, each evening, these men with their beards and gold skullcaps sat on the grass round paraffin lanterns and amused themselves. They sang, they sometimes danced, they gossiped prodigiously, but above all they listened to travellers' tales.

They were Moslems of the Ismaili sect, and the Ismailis are as famous for trading as the Phoenicians. Their business takes them on long journeys, and has done so for centuries. Their ancestors dealt with the Queen of Sheba; Cleopatra's table was supplied by their caravans; and, as you may read in the book of Marco Polo, however far he went, he found they had been there before him. In the course of this immemorial travelling they have seen very great wonders, and like all good travellers they delight in telling about them.

I used to sit on my doorstep in the soft Bombay night and listen. Some of the tales were long and involved, as Oriental tales often are. But one was simple. It was told by a very old man whose beard had thinned to a wisp.

His name was Ibrahim, and he said that what he was about to tell us had happened to him when he was young. It was about the time Kaiser Wilhelm was talking of building a railway from Berlin to Baghdad. There were as yet no railways in the times he spoke of; only roads, and those were fit only for caravans.

Perhaps the thing Ibrahim said he saw was never there at all; yet, maybe it was. After all, we have found Ur of the Chaldees; we have found the walls of Jericho; and if you go to Babylon you may run between your fingers sand that was laid down by the

Flood. I, for my part, believe that Ibrahim meant exactly what he said.

Praises to God, Who is worthy of praise—he began—and may He bless Mohammed, the seal of the prophets. What I say is true, and may God punish anyone who says it is not.

When I was a young man, I went each year to the town of Tabriz to meet the caravan that came in every autumn from China. Tabriz is crowded and the people are verminous. For a whole month we had to sleep fifteen or twenty to a room at the inn, sharing it with the family of the owner; and although our rupees were the only money he made in the whole year, not even those would persuade him to keep the room or his family clean.

I detested these visits and begged my father not to take me. But he would reply that there was no place in the world where one could learn the true art of bargaining so well. A bargain struck after a month of haggling is a beautiful thing, as we all know, but the art of striking it must be learnt. My father said that my education would not be complete until I produced a bargain so astonishing that he would have felt proud to have made it himself.

But that wasn't easy for someone as youthful as I. I was no match for the Chinese merchants; indeed, I was their meat and drink, and year after year I would watch the caravan go away, knowing that my father would bring me back to the noise, the dirt, the smells, and the lice of Tabriz.

Then one year, when I was about twenty-two, a young man asked leave to speak to me in secret. We withdrew into a corner and he explained that he knew I was looking for some especially fine bargain to impress my father. He went on to say that in the mountains to the north was a band of robbers who had made a rich haul but they had no way of disposing of it in the open market. For a consideration, he said, he would take me to them —a two-day journey by mule.

I went. I told my father nothing, because I knew that he would instantly suspect a trap and forbid me to go. Of course, I did not entirely put out of my own mind the possibility that the man meant to deceive me. I armed myself with a large dagger which I hid in my tunic; and I took very little money. My plan was to meet the robbers, see what they had to offer, and then promise to return with enough gold to buy what I wanted.

We journeyed two days into the foothills of the mountains until we came to a rock my companion pointed out as the place where we should meet the robbers. We did. My companion shouted a password and a dozen ruffians came pouring from their hiding-

places. The first knocked me down. The next stood on my stomach, while another stamped on my shinbones.

I roared with pain. I shouted that I would give them all the money I had, and they allowed me to get up. I handed them my thin purse, and when they found how little it contained, they began kicking me. I was fumbling for my dagger when I felt a tremendous blow on the back of my head and I fell senseless to the ground.

I recovered, it seemed, instantly. In fact, as I learnt later, weeks had passed. As I regained my senses I felt another blow on my head and thought the robbers were still beating me. I bellowed with pain; and another blow, this time on my shoulders, made me turn round, and I saw that I was being stoned by some shepherds who were gesturing to me to go away.

I looked around me and saw that I was on a sloping hillside, and I was astonished that the countryside was quite different from that where the robbers had attacked me. Seeing a clump of trees farther up the hill, I ran with all my might until I reached its shelter. The shepherds shrugged their shoulders and walked off as though I were no more than a stray dog they wanted to drive away.

And in fact my appearance was more animal than human. I was naked and caked in mud. My hair was long and matted, and my body scratched as though I had been through briars.

I cannot be sure, even now, what had happened to me. When the robbers found me senseless at their feet, it would have been simple for them to kill me. But I suppose they had no wish to have a serious crime on their hands; not, at least, for the small amount of money they had got from me. They must have left me, therefore, and fled to their hiding-places.

I decided that the shepherds must have found me and succoured me. The blow on my head which the robbers had given me had unbalanced my faculties: I was out of my wits and therefore an object of superstitious reverence to the herdsmen. They must have kept me with them for some time, feeding me as they made their way with their flocks. I should have brought them luck, but I suppose I did not. They were driving me from among them when a stone hit me and restored my reason.

When I was quite sure that the shepherds were not returning, I came out of the shelter of the trees and looked around. I found that I was in the middle of a circle of hills, broken here and there by valleys that seemed to lead only to more hills and these, in their turn, to mountains, so that the whole landscape was like an ocean on which vast waves suddenly had been stilled.

I looked towards the sun to find my bearings, but soon realized

this would not help, since I had no idea how far or in what direction I had wandered with the shepherds. For a while I gave way to despair, and then I hit upon the notion that since it was autumn, the shepherds would be making their way to winter quarters in some settlement. I therefore set out, almost at a run, in the direction in which I had seen them go.

Then I recalled the stoning. Clearly, if I overtook them, I would die, and painfully. I sat down and wept.

This paroxysm of grief soon passed and I went towards a small stream where I bathed and drank. The water was cold and pure. As I raised my head a breeze blew down the valley stirring my hair. I faced the wind, letting it cool my face. And I breathed a perfume so exquisite that it almost ravished my senses away.

It was compounded of spices, of flowers, of the wood of the incense tree, and yet it had none of the heaviness that weighs down the smell of spices. It was as fresh as the smell of verbena crushed between your fingers, yet as rich as sandalwood.

As the breeze played upon my face it brought an extraordinary lightness to my spirits, a joyousness like that of a child. I drew in deep breaths of the intoxicating perfume and felt as a prisoner must feel when set free. I felt that all sorrow and misery were behind, that all in future would be happy. Nothing seemed more desirable than to find the place from which the wind blew, and I immediately set out to do so.

It came from the same quarter among the hills as the stream. I followed the banks, and the perfume grew stronger. Otherwise, I saw nothing but the hills on either side, which were rocky and featureless. They were so much alike that without the stream and the wind to guide me, I should have lost my way.

Then, suddenly, as I rounded a bend in the stream, I saw one hill so much vaster than the rest that it seemed a mountain, or rather a tableland, for the top was quite flat. Round the edge of the plateau ran a strange, dark line which I first took to be a dense line of trees. But when I drew nearer I saw that it was a gigantic wall.

I reached the source of the stream and began climbing. The ascent was easy, but I had to keep my gaze on the ground. When at last I looked up, the wall was right above me, towering fifty feet high and stretching as far as I could see.

I have seen the walls of the Forbidden City and the Great Wall of China; I have stood beneath the walls of Krak of the Crusaders—but this was more massive. And although the walls of the Forbidden City seem as old as history, this one seemed as old as time itself.

A thick moss covered the stones and between them long,

hanging plants had grown, some with stems as thick as the trunks of trees. Standing below the wall I found that the breeze had died away, but the exotic smell of spice and incense still pervaded the air. I seized the creepers and began to climb, wild with desire to see beyond the wall. But the ascent was too difficult, the vines too tangled, and I could go no higher than a few feet. I went down and began running round the foot of the wall, thinking that somewhere there would be a gateway.

So it turned out. The gate had fallen in a great jumble of ruins, the strangest I have ever seen. Here there was no moss, no creeper. The huge stones of the gate were so polished that they mirrored the sun. There were green stones, and red, and blue, and a glowing yellow. They were veined like marble, but with colours more splendid than any marble from an earthly quarry; and they were carved so cunningly with tendrils and flowers that it seemed a garden turned into stone.

Going closer, I saw the strangest thing of all. The great side pillars of the gate still stood, but they were dulled. A brown-and-blackish stain had spread over them. They had been burnt.

No sooner had I noticed this than I saw that the stones had fallen in such a way that it would be easy to climb over the ruin. My heart beat wildly. I knew very well what place it was. The sages of our holy religion, the dreamers, the saints, and the mystics have always told us that this place existed, though no man had ever found it. The gate had been built not by human hands, but by angels, and it was the flaming sword of an angel that had burnt its pillars.

I climbed the stones. I stood on the topmost block. I looked down and I saw that place from which, as the Seventh Sura of the Holy Koran tells us, our first parents were driven forth.

I saw the Garden of Eden.

I climbed down into the Garden and walked in the terrestrial paradise. How shall I describe to you what I saw? How shall I tell you how I felt? I am reminded of the Grand Vizier with whom I once had the honour of dealing in Istanbul.

He told me of a time he bought an Armenian concubine of flawless beauty. There was not a single fault in any of her proportions and her face conformed to the most exacting standards in shape, colour, measurements, and harmony. Her temperament was docile, her voice melodious, and her conversation sparing. She had, as a final attraction, cost a great deal of money. Unfortunately, the Grand Vizier, surveying her perfection, could not find the least desire to make love to her.

He was at first embarrassed and, at length, enraged. He

ordered her to be sent home to her parents. She was packing her trunks when she fell into a quarrel with another concubine over a trinket. The other concubine hit her and gave her a black eye. That evening the Grand Vizier saw her, and was instantly seized with a desire stronger than he had felt since he was twenty years old. He ordered her bags to be unpacked immédiately . . .

Gentlemen, the Garden of Eden is perfect; and, gentlemen, perfectly tedious. The design of the garden is impeccable; the trees are superb and well grouped. The grass walks are smooth and tidy; the vistas thoughtfully planned. The large ornamental lake in the centre is pellucid, and the air perpetually calm. The grounds, if I may call them that, are stocked with birds and small animals. But since there is no mating, the birds do not sing. There is no season in which the deer are in rut, so they have nothing to do but eat and eye one another with glassy stares.

A brown dog came up to me and licked my hand. Since there is no death in Eden, I supposed that this was the selfsame animal that Adam first called "dog." The thought of this, for a while at least, entertained me.

I spoke to it and it wagged its tail. But soon the dog yawned, and sitting down on its haunches gazed vacantly into space.

I spent several hours wandering through the silent garden, identifying some of the aromatic trees, startling lethargic birds into the air, and growing, each minute, more oppressed.

The sun began to go down and I gathered some fruit from the trees and ate it. I hoped that I had chosen the forbidden tree, but if I had, I felt no sudden revelation.

I made my way back to where I had left the dog and I found it in the same posture. I sat down beside it and spoke to it.

As I did so a great longing rose up in me. The dirt, the chicanery, the vices of Tabriz suddenly seemed to me to be the most desirable things on earth. I could not imagine how I could ever have wished to leave such an enchanting place; and I said so to the dog. It wagged its tail and that encouraged me. I enlarged on the pleasures of Tabriz. I drew word pictures of its public harlots and my eloquence was such that I made the dog bark.

This unusual sound attracted some deer, some birds, and two or three monkeys. The birds sat on the branches of a tree over my head, and the animals formed a circle round the dog and me. More animals joined the circle each moment, but I could not distinguish them, partly because the light was failing, but more because I was so rapt in my exposition of the world's vices.

When I had gone through some of the more lurid experiences of my youth—and among them I scattered a few outrageous

untruths, thus making myself the second liar to speak in Paradise, the first being, of course, the devil—I began singing songs. I sang *There was a girl of Teheran*, and I sang *My husband drives a camel, and he has a wooden leg*, and *Oh, oh, oh, the Captain of the dhow*. I am sure you gentlemen know these songs, for they are sung wherever there is an Arab sailor and they are everywhere. My singing wasn't good, but it was hearty.

The animals sat round in an absorbed silence and when I began to dance—no one can sing *Oh, oh, oh, the Captain of the dhow* without dancing—they watched every movement. As well they might, for it must have been a strange sight—a naked and dirty man, bearded, shaggy-locked, bellowing in the middle of Eden.

The more I sang, the more my spirits rose, and I think I would have gone on far into the night, but a great clap of thunder drowned my voice and sent the animals scurrying wildly away.

I fell silent. There was a searing flash of lightning, and again thunder, but louder and, if I may say so with reverence, angrier.

I felt something pressed against my leg. I looked down and saw the dog cowering and trembling. The dog, alone of all the animals, had not left me.

It began to rain torrentially. I remembered that such a downpour once before was the expression of Divine irritation—as the Prophet tells us—so I took to my heels. In spite of the uproar and pelting confusion of the storm, I found my way to the ruined gate.

With water streaming down my face, and gasping for breath, I began to climb the fallen stones. The rain made them slippery and I slid back almost as much as I climbed; almost, but not quite, and slowly I managed to get myself twenty feet or so up the mound. I remember I prayed as I had done when I was a child. I remember I promised God that if He would let me out of Paradise and allow me to get to Tabriz, I would be a good boy.

If that sounds to you, gentlemen, a confused prayer, I can only say that Omniscience can see all round a question because, in fact, I did escape.

I was at the top of the mound and could see down the other side when, between two peals of thunder, I heard the long, heartbroken howl of the dog. I looked back and saw it, some fifteen feet below me. It was gazing at me with frantic anxiety and I saw that the poor beast had become wedged between two blocks of stone.

The thunder roared again and the dog contorted itself in a violent effort to get free, only to sink lower between the stones. I turned back, picked and slid my way towards the animal and, scarcely able to maintain my own balance, I bent over and seized

it by the scruff of its neck. After some minutes, I freed the dog. During those minutes the storm slackened. God is good.

So we escaped together, the dog and I, and made our way down the valley, I shouting for joy, the dog bounding and barking and shaking the water off its back in an ecstasy of happiness.

She—for I now noticed, for the first time, that it was a bitch—was responsible for my being here tonight to tell this story. The storm died away, but it was now night-time and we both fell asleep in the shelter of some bushes. The morning dawned clear, save for a cloud which hid the mountaintop of Eden.

I found some berries. The dog, with an agility that I had never before seen in such an animal, caught a rat. Her joy in this act of murder, the first in her life, was so great that she tossed it again and again triumphantly in the air and almost lost it in the stream. We set out when we had eaten and made good speed.

But, as I feared, we came upon the shepherds. Seeing me return with, I suppose, all the ill-luck they thought I carried with me, they and their dogs set upon me. I saw one shepherd unsheath a knife, and I ran. I heard a scream of pain. I turned to see the dog that Adam named sink its teeth into the thigh of the first shepherd, its eyes blazing with the fierce new joy of battle. The shepherds' dogs cowered in fear. Comparing the dog that was defending me with the mundane animals of the shepherds, I saw that it shone with the unearthly beauty of a creation fresh from the hand of God.

The shepherds fled in terror of this magnificent beast, and so did others who tried to molest us later in our long wanderings. I did not know which way to go, but five times a day I said my prayers according to the rule of the Prophet—although whether I bowed towards Mecca or to some city of idolaters I could not tell. God is merciful. On rising from my prayers, I went forward in whatever direction seemed best to me at the moment, believing that if it were written where all things are written that I should die, then I should die, and if not, then I should live. I am here; I am an old, old man, but I am here, alive. God is compassionate.

After several days, when I was so weary and footsore that it seemed I could go no farther, I saw in the distance the dust of a caravan. With my last strength I made towards it, shouting my name and my father's name. They heard me and stopped. Their leader got down from his camel, and repeated my name in great astonishment. I fell into his arms. He was much moved, for he was a friend of my father. He told me that everyone had believed me dead, except my father, who sat in his room day after day,

going to the door again and again whenever he heard a footstep.

They washed me and clothed me and fed me and the dog. I could neither walk nor ride, so they put me in a litter and carried me to the next town.

My father's friend gave me money with which I was able to hire a horse and a guide to take me back to Tabriz. First, I rested a week in the town to regain my strength and then, riding slowly with the dog running beside me, I followed my guide over the hills and so came safely to Tabriz.

The town I had left with such disgust seemed the most desirable of cities; the people I had so disliked were as welcome to my sight as long-absent friends. One townsman greeted me especially warmly and told me that my father had remained in Tabriz ever since I disappeared. So I hurried to the inn. The courtyard was empty and I went straight to the common room where we had always stayed.

But my father heard my footsteps and opened the door before I could enter. He looked at me. He was hollow-cheeked. His shoulders were bowed and his fine black eyes, that I had seen flash so handsomely when he drove a bargain, were dull and lifeless.

He gazed at me and then said in a soft, uncertain voice, "Forgive me, I thought you were my son. He has been away and I am expecting him." His lips trembled and he said again, humbly, "Forgive me. Forgive me. I was mistaken." He turned away.

He had gone so many times to the door, and so many times been cruelly disappointed, that disappointment had become a habit.

"Father!" I said. "I am back. It is your son." He turned round. He saw who I was. Then he sank slowly to his knees, bent to the ground as we do when we pray, and wept. He wept as bitterly as if I were dead, so close are joy and sorrow.

I, who had never seen an old man's tears, stood still, unable to move. The dog, which had never seen tears at all, crept forward and licked his hands.

The innkeeper and his family, whom I had thought so slatternly and evil, gave a great feast that evening to celebrate my return and my father's happiness; for, during the long days of his vigil, they had grown to pity him. When Adam left the Garden, he brought death and grief to the world, it is true, but let us remember that he also brought compassion.

Later, when my father was once more himself, I tried to tell him of my adventure. But he only laughed delightedly, patted the dog, and told me I could save my breath. I had won my spurs, he said. I had made a fine bargain. I had brought back the most magnificent dog in the world. We would take it to

El Qâhira, where the Vizier had a passion for dogs that transcended even his passion for money.

My father did not want to know how I came by the bargain. "One good merchant," he said, and here he took me by the hand, "does not pry into the secrets of another. We shall sell the dog for a bag of gold."

When I heard him say this, I was very sad, for I did not want to part with her. My father understood my feelings but he said that business was business. That, as I know you gentlemen will agree, is a profound truth, but it has always seemed to me that one should not take too narrow a view of it.

It was the bitch herself who showed me the way out of my difficulty. I saw her playing in the courtyard with a dog with whom she had grown friendly, and as I watched her, lithe, shining, and beautiful as the morning, I knew what I should do.

We took her to the Vizier. There, in the Vizier's presence, greatly daring, I told him that I could not sell her. I had taken a vow on the Holy Koran that I would not, and when I told him how I had come by her, rage as he might, he could not but agree that it was a vow I could not break.

As I had foreseen, he demanded that she be mated with the finest in his palace and that he should have the pups. I agreed. The pups were masterpieces and for each of them I demanded a price as high as I would have asked for the dog alone. The Vizier paid cheerfully, as people do who have been well cheated.

With that money, so curiously earned, I started trading on my own account. I prospered and my father was able to retire from his labours and spend his old age in peace. In the fullness of years he died, and soon after him, the dog. Both loved me; both were content with me, as a son, and as a master.

Do not misunderstand me, gentlemen. If I speak of the dog and my father in one breath, I do not mean any disrespect to his memory, nor would he think I did. No, gentlemen. My father was a good man, a very good man, and when we weigh His Highness tomorrow afternoon there will be a diamond in the boxes, bought and given in his memory.

And I think my father would be happy to know that there will be another diamond, small, it is true, but of the finest quality, bought and given in memory of a great brown dog that once belonged to the first father of us all.

★ ★ ★

SHEER SENSE

Too much hedging leads to ditching.

★ *Argosy reprints this story as a tribute to the memory of Dorothy L. Sayers. The penetrating brilliance which characterized her as a distinguished classical scholar, dramatist, and theologian was employed solely for her own—and our—amusement when she turned to detective fiction, creating Lord Peter, devising the taut excitement of "Murder Must Advertise," or the intricate changes of "The Nine Tailors." All her writing is first-class entertainment and endows us with a lasting sense of enjoyment.*

THE HAUNTED POLICEMAN

BY DOROTHY L. SAYERS

"GOOD God!" said his lordship. "Did I do that?"

"All the evidence points that way," replied his wife.

"Then I can only say that I never knew so convincing a body of evidence to produce such an inadequate result."

The nurse appeared to take this reflection personally. She said in a tone of rebuke: "He's a *beautiful* boy."

"H'm," said Peter. He adjusted his eyeglass more carefully. "Well, you're the expert witness. Hand him over."

The nurse did so, with a dubious air. She was relieved to see that this disconcerting parent handled the child competently; as, in a man who was an experienced uncle, was not, after all, so very surprising. Lord Peter sat down gingerly on the edge of the bed.

"Do you feel it's up to standard?" he inquired with some anxiety. "Of course, *your* workmanship's always sound—but you never know with these collaborate efforts."

"I think it'll do," said Harriet, drowsily.

"Good." He turned abruptly to the nurse. "All right; we'll keep it. Take it and put it away, and tell 'em to invoice it to me. It's a very interesting addition to you, Harriet; but it would have been a hell of a rotten substitute." His voice wavered a little, for the last twenty-four hours had been very trying ones, and he had had the fright of his life.

The doctor, who had been doing something in the other room, entered in time to catch the last words. "There was never any likelihood of that, you goop," he said cheerfully. "Go to bed," he advised him in kindly accents; "you look all in."

"I'm all right," said Peter. "I haven't been doing anything. And look here . . ." He stabbed a belligerent finger in the direction of the adjoining room. "Tell those nurses of yours if I want to pick my son up I'll pick him up. If his mother wants to kiss him, she can damn well kiss him. I'll have none of your infernal hygiene in *my* house."

"Very well," said the doctor, "just as you like. Anything for a quiet life. I rather believe in a few healthy germs myself. Builds up resistance . . . No, thanks, I won't have a drink. I've got to go on to another one, and an alcoholic breath impairs confidence."

"Another one?" said Peter, aghast.

"One of my hospital mothers. You're not the only fish in the sea by a long chalk. One born every minute."

"God! what a hell of a world."

They passed down the great curved stair. In the hall a sleepy footman clung, yawning, to his post of duty.

"All right, William," said Peter. "Buzz off now; I'll lock up." He let the doctor out. "Good night—and thanks very much, old man. I'm sorry I swore at you."

"They mostly do," replied the doctor philosophically. "Well, I'll look in again later, just to earn my fee, but I shan't be wanted. You've married into a good tough family and I congratulate you."

The car, spluttering and protesting a little after its long wait in the cold, drove off, leaving Peter alone on the doorstep. Now that it was all over and he could go to bed, he felt extraordinarily wakeful. He would have liked to go to a party. He leaned back against the wrought-iron railings and lit a cigarette, staring vaguely into the lamplit dusk of the square. It was thus that he saw the policeman.

The blue-uniformed figure came up from the direction of South Audley Street. He, too, was smoking, and he walked, not with the firm tramp of a constable on his beat, but with the hesitating step of a man who has lost his bearings. When he came in sight, he had pushed back his helmet and was rubbing his head in a puzzled manner. Official habit made him look sharply at the bare-headed gentleman in evening dress, abandoned on a doorstep at three in the morning, but since the gentleman appeared to be sober and bore no signs of being about to commit a felony, he averted his gaze and prepared to pass on.

"'Morning, officer," said the gentleman, as he came abreast.

"'Morning, sir," said the policeman.

"You're off duty early," pursued Peter, who wanted somebody to talk to. "Come in and have a drink."

This offer reawakened all the official suspicion.

"Not just now, sir, thank you," replied the policeman guardedly.

"Yes, now. That's the point." Peter tossed away his cigarette-end. It described a fiery arc in the air and shot out a little train of sparks as it struck the pavement. "I've got a son."

"Oh, ah!" said the policeman, relieved by this innocent confidence. "Your first, eh?"

"And last, if I know anything about it."

"That's what my brother says, every time," said the policeman. "'Never no more,' he says. He's got eleven. Well, sir, good luck to it. I see how you're situated, and thank you kindly, but after what the sergeant said I dunno as I better. Though if I was to die this moment, not a drop's passed me lips since me supper beer."

Peter put his head on one side and considered this.

"The sergeant said you were drunk?"

"He did, sir."

"And you were not?"

"No, sir. I saw everything just the same as I told him, though what's become of it now is more than I can say. But drunk I was not, sir, no more than you are yourself."

"Then," said Peter, "as Mr. Joseph Surface remarked to Lady Teazle, what is troubling you is the consciousness of your own innocence. He insinuated that you had looked on the wine when it was red—you'd better come in and make it so. You'll feel better."

The policeman hesitated.

"Well, sir, I dunno. Fact is, I've had a bit of a shock."

"So've I," said Peter. "Come in, for God's sake, and keep me company."

"Well, sir . . ." said the policeman again. He mounted the steps slowly.

The logs in the hall chimney were glowing a deep red through their ashes. Peter raked them apart, so that the young flame shot up between them. "Sit down," he said; "I'll be back in a moment."

The policeman sat down, removed his helmet, and stared about him, trying to remember who occupied the big house at the corner of the square. The engraved coat of arms upon the great silver bowl on the chimneypiece told him nothing, even though it was repeated in colour upon the backs of two tapestried chairs: three white mice skipping upon a black ground.

Peter, returning quietly from the shadows beneath the stair, caught him as he traced the outlines with a thick finger.

"A student of heraldry?" he said. "Seventeenth-century work and not very graceful. You're new to this beat, aren't you? My name's Wimsey."

He put a tray on the table. "If you'd rather have beer or whisky, say so. These bottles are only a concession to my mood."

The policeman eyed the long necks and bulging silver-wrapped corks with curiosity. "Champagne?" he said. "Never tasted it, sir. But I'd like to try the stuff."

"You'll find it thin," said Peter, "but if you drink enough of it, you'll tell me the story of your life." The cork popped, and the wine frothed out into the wide glasses.

"Well," said the policeman. "Here's to your good lady, sir, and the new young gentleman. Long life and all the best . . . A bit in the nature of cider, ain't it, sir?"

"Just a trifle. Give me your opinion after the third glass, if you can put up with it so long. And thanks for your good wishes. You a married man?"

"Not yet, sir. Hoping to be when I get promotion. If only the sergeant—but that's neither here nor there. You been married long, sir, if I may ask?"

"Just over a year."

"Ah! And do you find it comfortable, sir?"

Peter laughed.

"I've spent the last twenty-four hours wondering why, when I'd had the blazing luck to get on to a perfectly good thing, I should be fool enough to risk the whole show on a damned silly experiment."

The policeman nodded sympathetically.

"I see what you mean, sir. Seems to me life's like that. If you don't take risks, you get nowhere. If you do, they may go wrong, and then where are you? And 'alf the time, when things happen, they happen first, before you can even think about 'em."

"Quite right," said Peter, and filled the glasses again. He found the policeman soothing. True to his class and training, he turned naturally in moments of emotion to the company of the common man.

Indeed, when the recent domestic crisis had threatened to destroy his nerve, he had headed for the butler's pantry with the swift instinct of the homing pigeon. There they had treated him with great humanity and allowed him to clean the silver.

With a mind oddly clarified by champagne and lack of sleep, he watched the constable's reaction to Pol Roger 1928. The first glass had produced a philosophy of life; the second produced a name—Alfred Burt—and further hints of some mysterious grievance against the station sergeant; the third glass, as prophesied, produced the story.

"You were right, sir," said the policeman, "when you spotted I was new to the beat. I only come on it at the beginning of the week, and that accounts for me not being acquainted with you, sir, nor with most of the residents about here.

"Jessop, now, he knows everybody, and so did Pinder—but he's been took off to another division. You'd remember Pinder—big chap, make two o' me, with a sandy moustache. Yes, I thought you would.

"Well, sir, as I was saying, me knowing the district in a general way, but not, so to speak, like the palm o' me 'and, might account for me making a bit of a fool of myself, but it don't account for me seeing what I did see. See it I did, and not drunk, nor nothing like it. And as for making a mistake in the number, well, that might happen to anybody. All the same, sir, thirteen was the number I see, plain as the nose on your face."

"You can't put it stronger than that," said Peter, whose nose was of a kind difficult to overlook.

"You know Merriman's End, sir?"

"I think I do. Isn't it a long cul-de-sac running somewhere at the back of South Audley Street, with a row of houses on one side, and a high wall on the other?"

"That's right, sir. Tall, narrow houses they are, all alike, with deep porches and pillars to them."

"Yes. Like an escape from the worst square in Pimlico. Horrible. Fortunately, I believe the street was never finished, or we should have had another row of the monstrosities on the opposite side. This house is pure eighteenth century. How does it strike you?"

P.C. Burt contemplated the wide hall—the Adam fireplace and panelling with their graceful shallow mouldings, the pedimented doorways, the high round-headed window lighting hall and gallery, the noble proportions of the stair. He sought for a phrase.

"It's a gentleman's house," he pronounced at length. "Room to breathe, if you see what I mean. Seems like you couldn't act vulgar in it."

He shook his head. "Mind you, I wouldn't call it cosy. It ain't the place I'd choose to sit down to a kipper in me shirtsleeves. But it's got class. I never thought about it before, but now you mention it I see what's wrong with them other houses in Merriman's End. They're sort of squeezed-like. I been into more'n one o' them tonight, and that's what they are; they're squeezed. But I was going to tell you about that.

"Just upon midnight it was," pursued the policeman, "when I turns into Merriman's End in the ordinary course of my dooties. I'd got pretty near down towards the far end, when I see a fellow lurking about in a suspicious way under the wall. There's back gates there, you know, sir, leading into some gardens, and this chap was hanging about inside one of the gateways. A rough-looking fellow, in a baggy old coat—might a-been a tramp off the Embankment.

"I turned my light on him—that street's not very well lit, and it's a dark night—but I couldn't see much of his face because he had on a ragged old hat and a big scarf round his neck. I thought he was up to no good, and I was just about to ask him what he was doing there, when I hear a most awful yell come out o' one o' them houses opposite. Ghastly it was, sir. 'Help!' it said. 'Murder! Help!' Fit to freeze your marrow."

"Man's voice or woman's?"

"Man's, sir, I think. More of a roaring kind of yell, if you take my meaning. I says, 'Hullo! What's up there? Which house is it?'

"The chap says nothing but he points, and him and me runs across together. Just as we gets to the house, there's a noise like as if someone was being strangled just inside, and a thump, as it might be something falling against the door."

"Good God!" said Peter.

"I gives a shout and rings the bell. 'Hoy!' I says. 'What's up here?' and then I knocks on the door. There's no answer, so

I rings and knocks again. Then the chap who was with me, he pushes open the letter-flap and squints through it."

"Was there a light in the house?"

"It was all dark, sir, except the fanlight over the door. That was lit up bright, and when I looks up, I see the number of the house—number thirteen, painted plain as you like on the transom. Well, this chap peers in, and all of a sudden he gives a kind of gurgle and falls back. 'Here!' I says, 'what's amiss? Let me have a look.' So I puts me eye to the flap and I looks in."

P.C. Burt paused and drew a long breath. Peter cut the wire of the second bottle.

"Now, sir," said the policeman, "believe me or believe me not, I was as sober at that moment as I am now. I can tell you everything I see in that house same as if it was wrote up there on that wall. Not as it was a great lot, because the flap wasn't all that wide, but by squinnying a bit, I could make shift to see right across the hall and a piece on both sides and part-way up the stairs. And here's what I see, and you take notice of every word, on account of what came after."

He took another gulp of the Pol Roger to loosen his tongue, and continued: "There was the floor of the hall, I could see that very plain. All black-and-white squares it was, like marble, and it stretched back a good long way. About halfway along, on the left, was the staircase, with a red carpet, and the figure of a white naked woman at the foot, carrying a big pot of blue and yellow flowers.

"In the wall next the stairs there was an open door and a room all lit up. I could just see the end of a table with a lot of glass and silver on it. Between that door and the front door there was a big black cabinet, shiny, with gold figures painted on it, like them things they had at the Exhibition. Right at the back of the hall was a place like a conservatory, but I couldn't see what was in it, only it looked very gay.

"There was a door on the right, and that was open, too. A very pretty drawing-room, by what I could see of it, with pale blue paper and pictures on the walls. There were pictures in the hall, too, and a table on the right with a copper bowl, like as it might be for visitors' cards to be put in. Now, I see all that, sir, and I put it to you, if it hadn't a-been there, how could I describe it so plain?"

"I have known people describe what wasn't there," said Peter thoughtfully, "but it was seldom anything of that kind. Rats, cats, and snakes I have heard of, and occasionally naked female figures; but delirious lacquer cabinets and hall tables are new to me."

"As you say, sir," agreed the policeman, "and I see you believe me so far. But here's something else, what you mayn't find quite so easy.

"There was a man laying in that hall, sir, as sure as I sit here, and he was dead. He was a big man and clean-shaven, and

he wore evening dress. Somebody had stuck a knife into his throat. I could see the handle of it—it looked like a carving knife, and the blood had run out, all shiny, over the marble squares."

The policeman looked at Peter, passed his handkerchief over his forehead and finished the fourth glass of champagne.

"His head was up against the end of the hall table," he went on, "and his feet must have been up against the door, but I couldn't see anything quite close to me because of the letter-box. You understand, sir, I was looking through the wire cage of the box, and there was something inside—letters, I suppose, that cut off my view downward. But I see all the rest in front and a bit of both sides; and it must have been regularly burnt in upon my brain, as they say, for I don't suppose I was looking more than a quarter of a minute or so.

"Then all the lights went out at once, same as if somebody had turned off the main switch. So I looks round, and I don't mind telling you I felt a bit queer. And *when* I looks round, lo and behold! my bloke in the muffler had hopped it."

"The devil he had," said Peter.

"Hopped it," repeated the policeman, "and there I was. And just there, sir, is where I made my big mistake, for I thought he couldn't a-got far, and I started off up the street after him. But I couldn't see him, and I couldn't see nobody.

"All the houses was dark, and it come over me what a sight of funny things may go on, and nobody take a mite o' notice. The way I'd shouted and banged on the door, you'd a-thought it'd a-brought out every soul in the street, not to mention that awful yelling.

"But there—you may have noticed it yourself, sir. A man may leave his ground-floor windows open, or have his chimney afire, and you may make enough noise to wake the dead, trying to draw his attention, and nobody give no heed. He's fast asleep, and the neighbours say, 'Blast that row, but it's no business of mine,' and stick their 'eads under the bedclothes."

"Yes," said Peter. "London's like that."

"That's right, sir. A village is different. You can't pick up a pin there without somebody coming up to ask you where you got it from—but London keeps itself to itself . . . Well, something'll have to be done, I thinks to myself, and I blows me whistle. They heard that all right. Windows started to go up all along the street. That's London, too."

Peter nodded, "London will sleep through the last trump. Puddley-in-the-Rut and Doddering-in-the-Dumps will look down their noses and put on virtuous airs. But God, who is never surprised, will say to his angel, 'Whistle 'em up, Michael, whistle 'em up; East and West will rise from the dead at the sound of the policeman's whistle.'"

"Quite so, sir," said P.C. Burt; and wondered for the first time whether there might not be something in this champagne stuff after all. He waited for a moment and then resumed: "Well, it so

happened that just when I sounded me whistle, Withers—that's the man on the other beat—was in Audley Square, coming to meet me. You know, sir, we has times for meeting one another, arranged different-like every night; and twelve o'clock in the square was our rendyvoos tonight.

" So up he comes in, you might say, no time at all, and finds me there, with everyone a-hollering at me from the windows to know what was up.

" Well, naturally, I didn't want the whole bunch of 'em running out into the street and our man getting away in the crowd, so I just tells 'em there's nothing, only a bit of an accident farther along. And then I see Withers and glad enough I was.

" We stands there at the top o' the street, and I tells him there's a dead man laying in the hall at number thirteen, and it looks to me like murder.

" 'Number thirteen?' he says, ' you can't mean number thirteen. There ain't no number thirteen in Merriman's End, you fathead; it's all even numbers.' And so it is, sir, for the houses on the other side were never built, so there's no odd numbers at all, barrin' number one, as is the big house on the corner.

" Well, that give me a bit of a jolt. I wasn't so much put out at not having remembered about the numbers, for as I tell you, I never was on the beat before this week. No; but I knew I'd seen that there number writ up plain as pie on the fanlight, and I didn't see how I could have been mistaken.

" But when Withers heard the rest of the story, he thought maybe I'd misread it for number twelve. It couldn't be eighteen, for the numbers only go up to sixteen in the road; nor it couldn't be sixteen neither, for I knew it wasn't the end house. But we thought it might be twelve or ten; so away we goes to look.

" We didn't have no difficulty about getting in at number twelve. There was a very pleasant old gentleman came down in his dressing-gown, asking what the disturbance was and could he be of use. I apologized for disturbing him and said I was afraid there'd been an accident in one of the houses, and had he heard anything.

" Of course, the minute he opened the door I could see it wasn't number twelve we wanted; there was only a little hall with polished boards, and the walls plain panelled—all very bare and neat—and no black cabinet nor naked woman nor nothing. The old gentleman said, yes, his son had heard somebody shouting and knocking a few minutes earlier. He'd got up and put his head out of the window, but couldn't see nothing, but they both thought from the sound it was number fourteen forgotten his latchkey again. So we thanked him very much and went on to number fourteen.

" We had a bit of a job to get number fourteen downstairs. A fiery sort of gentleman he was, something in the military way, I thought, but he turned out to be a retired Indian Civil Servant. A dark gentleman, with a big voice, and his servant was dark, too.

" The gentleman wanted to know what the blazes all this row was about, and why a decent citizen wasn't allowed to get his proper

sleep. He supposed that young fool at number twelve was drunk again. Withers had to speak a bit sharp to him; but at last the servant came down and let us in.

"Well, we had to apologize once more. The hall was not a bit like—the staircase was on the wrong side, for one thing, and though there was a statue at the foot of it, it was some kind of heathen idol with a lot of heads and arms, and the walls were covered with all sorts of brass stuff and native goods—you know the kind of thing. There was a black-and-white linoleum on the floor, and that was about all there was to it.

"The servant had a soft sort of way with him that I didn't half like. He said he slept at the back and had heard nothing till his master rang for him.

"Then the gentleman came to the top of the stairs and shouted out it was no use disturbing him; the noise came from number twelve as usual, and if that young man didn't stop his blanky Bohemian goings-on, he'd have the law on his father. I asked if he'd seen anything, and he said, no, he hadn't. Of course, sir, me and that other chap was inside the porch, and you can't see anything what goes on inside those porches from the outer houses, because they're filled in at the sides with coloured glass—all the lot of them."

Lord Peter Wimsey looked at the policeman and then looked at the bottle, as though estimating the alcoholic contents of each. With deliberation, he filled both glasses again.

"Well, sir," said P.C. Burt, after refreshing himself, "by this time Withers was looking at me in rather an odd-fashioned manner. However, he said nothing, and we went back to number ten, where there was two maiden ladies and a hall full of stuffed birds and wallpaper like a florist's catalogue.

"The one who slept in the front was deaf as a post, and the one who slept at the back hadn't heard nothing. But we got hold of their maids, and the cook said she'd heard the voice calling 'Help!' and thought it was in number twelve, and she'd hid her head in the pillow and said her prayers.

"The housemaid was a sensible girl. She'd looked out when she'd heard me knocking. She couldn't see anything at first, owing to us being in the porch, but she thought something must be going on, so, not wishing to catch cold, she went back to put on her bedroom slippers.

"When she got back to the window, she was just in time to see a man running up the road. He went very quick and very silent, as if he had galoshes on, and she could see the ends of his muffler flying out behind him. She saw him run out of the street and turn to the right, and then she heard me coming along after him. Unfortunately, her eye being on the man, she didn't notice much which porch I came out of.

"Well, that showed I wasn't inventing the whole story at any rate, because there was my bloke in the muffler. The girl didn't recognize him at all, but that wasn't surprising, because she'd only just entered the old ladies' service. Besides, it wasn't likely the

man had anything to do with it, because he was outside with me when the yelling started. My belief is, he was the sort as doesn't care to have his pockets examined too close, and the minute my back was turned he thought he'd be better and more comfortable elsewhere.

" Now there ain't no need," continued the policeman, " for me to trouble you, sir, with all them houses what we went into. We made inquiries at the whole lot, from number two to number sixteen, and there wasn't one of them had a hall in any ways conformable to what that chap and I saw through the letter-box. Nor there wasn't a soul in 'em could give us any help more than what we'd had already.

" You see, sir, though it took me a bit o' time telling, it all went very quick. There was the yells; they didn't last beyond a few seconds or so, and before they was finished we was across the road and inside the porch. Then there was me shouting and knocking; but I hadn't been long at that afore the chap with me looks through the box. Then I has my look inside, for fifteen seconds it might be, and while I'm doing that, my chap's away up the street. Then I runs after him, and then I blows me whistle. The whole thing might take a minute, or a minute and a half, maybe. Not more.

" Well, sir, by the time we'd been into every house in Merriman's End, I was feeling a bit queer again, I can tell you, and Withers, he was looking queerer. He says to me, ' Burt,' he says, ' is this your idea of a joke? Because if so, the 'Olborn Empire's where you ought to be, not the police force.'

" So I tells him over again, most solemn, what I seen—' and,' I says, ' if only we could lay hands on that chap in the muffler, he could tell you he seen it, too. And what's more,' I says, ' do you think I'd risk me job playing a silly trick like that?' He says, ' Well, it beats me,' he says. ' If I didn't know you was a sober kind of chap, I'd say you was seein' things.' ' Things?' I says to him, ' I see that there corpse a-layin' there with the knife in his neck, and that was enough for me. 'Orrible, he looked, and the blood all over the floor.'

" ' Well,' he says, ' maybe he wasn't dead after all, and they've cleared him out of the way.' ' And cleared the house away, too, I suppose,' I said to him.

" So Withers says, in an odd sort o' voice, ' You're sure about the house? You wasn't letting your imagination run away with you over naked females and such?' That was a nice thing to say. I said, ' No, I wasn't. There's been some monkey business going on in this street and I'm going to get to the bottom of it, if we has to comb out London for that chap in the muffler.'

" ' Yes,' says Withers, nasty-like, ' it's a pity he cleared off so sudden.' ' Well,' I says, ' you can't say I imagined *him*, anyhow, because that there girl saw him, and a mercy she did,' I said, ' or you'd be saying next I ought to be in Colney Hatch.' ' Well,' he says, ' I dunno what you think you're going to do about it. You better ring up the station and ask for instructions.'

"Which I did. And Sergeant Jones, he came down himself, and he listens attentive-like to what we both has to say, and then he walks along the street, slow-like, from end to end.

"And then he comes back and says to me, 'Now, Burt,' he says, 'just you describe that hall to me again, careful.' Which I does, same as I described it to you, sir. And he says, 'You're sure there was the room on the left of the stairs with the glass and silver on the table; and the room on the right with the pictures in it?' And I says, 'Yes, Sergeant, I'm quite sure of that.'

"And Withers says, 'Ah!' in a kind of got-you-now voice, if you take my meaning. And the sergeant says, 'Now, Burt,' he says, 'pull yourself together and take a look at these here houses. Don't you see they're all single-fronted? There ain't one of 'em has rooms *both* sides o' the front hall. Look at the windows, you fool,' he says."

Lord Peter poured out the last of the champagne.

"I don't mind telling you, sir," went on the policeman, "that I was fair knocked silly. To think of me never noticing that! Withers had noticed it all right, and that's what made him think I was drunk or barmy.

"But I stuck to what I'd seen. I said there must be two of them houses knocked into one, somewhere; but that didn't work, because we'd been into all of them, and there wasn't no such thing —not without there was one o' them concealed doors like you read about in crook stories. 'Well, anyhow,' I says to the sergeant, 'the yells was real all right, because other people heard 'em. Just you ask, and they'll tell you.' So the sergeant says, 'Well, Burt, I'll give you every chance.'

"So he knocks up number twelve again—not wishing to annoy number fourteen any more than he was already—and this time the son comes down. An agreeable gentleman he was, too; not a bit put out.

"He says, Oh, yes, he'd heard the yells and his father'd heard them, too. 'Number fourteen,' he says, 'that's where the trouble is. A very odd bloke, is number fourteen, and I shouldn't be surprised if he beats that unfortunate servant of his. The Englishman abroad, you know! The Outposts of Empire and all that kind of thing. They're rough and ready—and then the curry in them parts is bad for the liver.'

"So I was for inquiring at number fourteen again; but the sergeant, he loses patience, and says, 'You know quite well,' he says, 'it ain't number fourteen, and in my opinion, Burt, you're either dotty or drunk. You best go home straight away,' he says, 'and sober up, and I'll see you again when you can give a better account of yourself.'

"So I argues a bit, but it ain't no use, and away he goes, and Withers goes back to his beat. And I walks up and down a bit till Jessop comes to take over, and then I comes away, and that's when I sees you, sir.

"But I ain't drunk, sir—at least, I wasn't then, though there do

seem to be a kind of swimming in me head at this moment. Maybe that stuff's stronger than it tastes. But I wasn't drunk then, and I'm pretty sure I'm not dotty.

" I'm haunted, sir, that's what it is—haunted. It might be there was someone killed in one of them houses many years ago, and that's what I see tonight. Perhaps they changed the numbering of the street on account of it—I've heard tell of such things—and when the same night comes round the house goes back to what it was before. But there I am, with a black mark against me, and it ain't a fair trick for no ghost to go getting a plain man into trouble. And I'm sure, sir, you'll agree."

The policeman's narrative had lasted some time, and the hands of the grandfather clock stood at a quarter to five. Peter Wimsey gazed benevolently at his companion for whom he was beginning to feel a positive affection. He was, if anything, slightly more drunk than the policeman, for he had missed tea and had no appetite for his dinner; but the wine had not clouded his wits; it had only increased excitability and postponed sleep. He said: " When you looked through the letter-box, could you see any part of the ceiling, or the lights? "

" No, sir; on account, you see, of the flap. I could see right and left and straight forward; but not upwards, and none of the near part of the floor."

" When you looked at the house from the outside, there was no light except through the fanlight. But when you looked through the flap, all the rooms were lit, right and left and at the back? "

" That's so, sir."

" Are there back doors to the houses? "

" Yes, sir. Coming out of Merriman's End, you turn to the right, and there's an opening a little way along which takes you to the back doors."

" You seem to have a very distinct visual memory. I wonder if your other kinds of memory are as good. Can you tell me, for instance, whether any of the houses you went into had any particular smell? Especially ten, twelve, and fourteen? "

" Smell, sir? " The policeman closed his eyes to stimulate recollection. " Why, yes, sir. Number ten—where the two ladies live, that had a sort of old-fashioned smell. I can't put my tongue to it. Not lavender—but something as ladies keep in bowls and such—roseleaves and what not. Potpourri, that's the stuff. Potpourri.

" And number twelve—well, no, there was nothing particular there, except I remember thinking they must keep pretty good servants, though we didn't see anybody except the family. All that floor and panelling was polished beautiful—you could see your face in it. Beeswax and turpentine, I says to meself. And elbow-grease. What you'd call a clean house with a good, clean smell.

" But number fourteen—that was different. I didn't like the smell of that. Stuffy, like as if the dark chap had been burning some o' that there incense to his idols, maybe."

"Ah!" said Peter. "What you say is very suggestive." He placed his fingertips together and shot his last question over them. "Ever been inside the National Gallery?"

"No, sir," said the policeman, astonished. "I can't say as I ever was."

"That's London again," said Peter. "We're the last people in the world to know anything of our great metropolitan institutions. Now, what is the best way to tackle this bunch of toughs, I wonder? It's a little early for a call. Still, there's nothing like doing one's good deed before breakfast, and the sooner you're set right with the sergeant, the better.

"Let me see. Yes—I think that may do it. Costume pieces are not as a rule in my line, but my routine has been so much upset already, one way and another, that an irregularity more or less will hardly matter. Wait there for me while I have a bath and change. I may be a little time, but it would hardly be decent to get there before six."

The bath had been an attractive thought, but was perhaps ill-advised, for a curious languor stole over him with the touch of the hot water. The champagne was losing its effervescence. It was with an effort that he dragged himself out and reawakened himself with a cold shower.

The matter of dress required a little thought. A pair of grey flannel trousers was easily found, and though they were rather too well creased for the part he meant to play, he thought that with luck they would probably pass unnoticed. The shirt was a difficulty. His collection of shirts was a notable one, but they were mostly of an inconspicuous and gentlemanly sort. He decided at length upon a blue one, bought as an experiment and held to be not quite successful. A red tie, if he had possessed such a thing, would have been convincing.

After some consideration, he remembered that he had seen his wife in a rather wide Liberty tie, whose prevailing colour was orange. That, he felt, would do if he could find it. On her it had looked rather well; on him it would be completely abominable.

He went through into the next room; it was queer to find it empty. A peculiar sensation came over him. Here *he* was, rifling his wife's drawers, and there *she* was, spirited out of reach at the top of the house, with a couple of nurses and an entirely new baby, which might turn into goodness knew what.

He sat down before the glass and stared at himself. He felt as though he ought to have changed somehow in the night; but he only looked unshaven and, he thought, a trifle intoxicated. Both were quite good things to look at the moment, though hardly suitable for the father of a family.

He pulled out all the drawers in the dressing-table; they emitted vaguely-familiar smells of face-powder and handkerchief sachet. He tried the big built-in wardrobe; frocks, costumes, and trays full of underwear, which made him feel sentimental. At last he struck a promising vein of gloves and stockings. The next tray

held ties, the orange of the desired Liberty creation gleaming in a friendly way among them. He put it on, and observed with pleasure that the effect was Bohemian beyond description.

He wandered out again, leaving all the drawers open behind him as though a burglar had passed through the room. An ancient tweed jacket of his own was next unearthed, together with a pair of brown canvas shoes. He secured his trousers by a belt, searched for and found an old soft-brimmed felt hat of no recognizable colour, and, after removing a few trout-flies from the hatband and tucking his shirtsleeves well up inside the coatsleeves, decided that he would do.

As an afterthought, he returned to his wife's room and selected a wide woollen scarf in a shade of greenish blue. Thus equipped, he came downstairs again, to find P.C. Burt fast asleep, with his mouth open and snoring.

Peter was hurt. Here he was, sacrificing himself in the interests of this stupid policeman, and the man hadn't the common decency to appreciate it. However, there was no point in waking him yet. He yawned horribly and sat down.

It was the footman who wakened the sleepers at half past six. If he was surprised to see his master, very strangely attired, slumbering in the hall in company with a large policeman, he was too well-trained to admit the fact even to himself. He merely removed the tray. The faint clink of glass roused Peter, who slept like a cat at all times.

"Hullo, William," he said. "Have I overslept myself? What's the time?"

"Five and twenty to seven, my lord."

"Just about right." He remembered that the footman slept on the top floor. "*All quiet on the Western Front, William?*"

"Not altogether quiet, my lord," William permitted himself a slight smile. "The young master was lively about five. But all satisfactory, I gather from Nurse Jenkyn."

"Nurse Jenkyn? Is that the young one? Don't let yourself be run away with, William. I say, just give P.C. Burt a light prod in the ribs, would you? He and I have business together."

In Merriman's End, the activities of the morning were beginning. The milkman came jingling out of the cul-de-sac; lights were twinkling in upper rooms; at number ten, the housemaid was already scrubbing the steps.

Peter posted his policeman at the top of the street.

"I don't want to make my first appearance with official accompaniment," he said. "Come along when I beckon. What, by the way, is the name of the agreeable gentleman in number twelve? I think he may be of some assistance to us."

"Mr. O'Halloran, sir."

The policeman looked at Peter expectantly. He seemed to have abandoned all initiative and to place implicit confidence in this hospitable and eccentric gentleman. Peter slouched down the

street with his hands in his trousers' pockets, and his shabby hat pulled rakishly over his eyes.

At number twelve he paused and examined the windows. Those on the ground floor were open; the house was awake. He marched up the steps, took a brief glance through the flap of the letter-box and rang the bell. A maid in a neat blüe dress and white cap and apron opened the door.

"Good morning;" said Peter, slightly raising the shabby hat. "Is Mr. O'Halloran in?" He gave the "r" a soft Continental roll. "Not the old gentleman. I mean young Mr. O'Halloran."

"He's in," said the maid doubtfully, "but he isn't up yet."

"Oh!" said Peter. "Well, it is a little early for a visit. But I desire to sée him urgently. I am—there is a little trouble where I live. Could you entreat him—would you be so kind? I have walked all the way," he added pathetically and with perfect truth.

"Have you, sir?" said the maid. She added kindly, "You do look tired, sir, and that's a fact."

"It is nothing," said Peter. "It is only that I forgot to have any dinner. But if I can see Mr. O'Halloran it will be all right."

"You'd better come in, sir," said the maid. "I'll see if I can wake him." She conducted the exhausted stranger in and offered him a chair. "What name shall I say, sir?"

"Petrovinsky," said his lordship, hardily. As he had rather expected, neither the unusual name nor the unusual clothes of this unusually early visitor seemed to cause very much surprise. The maid left him in the tidy little panelled hall.

Left to himself, Peter sat still, noticing that the hall was remarkably bare of furniture and was lit by a single electric pendant almost immediately inside the front door. The letter-box was the usual wire cage, the bottom of which had been carefully lined with brown paper. From the back of the house came a smell of frying bacon.

Presently there was the sound of somebody running downstairs. A young man appeared in a dressing-gown. He called out as he came: "Is that you, Stefan? Your name came up as Mr. Whisky. Has Marfa run away again, or— What the hell? Who the devil are you, sir?"

"Wimsey," said Peter, mildly, "not Whisky; Wimsey, the policeman's friend. I just looked in to congratulate you on a mastery of the art of false perspective which I thought had perished with the ingenious Van Hoogstraaten."

"Oh!" said the young man. He had a pleasant countenance, with humorous eyes and ears pointed like a faun's. He laughed a little ruefully. "I suppose my beautiful murder is out. It was too good to last. Those bobbies! I hope to God they gave number fourteen a bad night . . . May I ask how you came to be involved?"

"I," said Peter, "am the kind of person in whom distressed constables confide—I cannot imagine why. And when I had the picture of that sturdy blue-clad figure, led so persuasively by a Bohemian stranger and invited to peer through a hole, I was irresistibly transported in mind to the National Gallery.

"Many a time have I squinted sideways through those holes into the little black box, and admired that Dutch interior of many vistas painted so convincingly on the four flat sides of the box. How right you were to preserve your eloquent silence! Your Irish tongue would have given you away. The servants, I gather, were purposely kept out of sight."

"Tell me," said Mr. O'Halloran, seating himself upon the hall table, "do you know by heart the occupation of every resident in this quarter of London? I do not paint under my own name."

"No," said Peter. "Like the good Dr. Watson, the constable could observe, though he could not reason from his observation; it was the smell of turpentine that betrayed you. I gather that at the time of his first call the apparatus was not very far off."

"It was folded together and lying under the stairs," replied the painter. "It has since been removed to the studio. My father had only just time to get it out of the way and hitch down the number thirteen from the fanlight before the police reinforcements arrived. He had not even time to put back this table I am sitting on; a brief search would have discovered it in the dining-room.

"My father is a remarkable sportsman; I cannot too highly recommend the presence of mind he displayed while I was haring round the houses and leaving him to hold the fort. It would have been so simple and so unenterprising to explain; but my father, being an Irishman, enjoys treading on the coat-tails of authority."

"I should like to meet your father. The only thing I do not thoroughly understand is the reason for this elaborate plot. Were you by any chance executing a burglary round the corner, and keeping the police in play while you did it?"

"I never thought of that," said the young man, with regret in his voice. "No. The bobby was not the predestined victim. He happened to be present at a full-dress rehearsal, and the joke was too good to be lost. The fact is, my uncle is Sir Lucius Preston, the R.A."

"Ah!" said Peter, "the light begins to break."

"My own style of draughtsmanship," pursued Mr. O'Halloran, "is modern. My uncle has, on several occasions, informed me that I draw like that only because I do not know how to draw. The idea was that he should be invited to dinner tomorrow and regaled with a story of the mysterious 'number thirteen' said to appear from time to time in this street and to be haunted by strange noises.

"Having thus detained him till close upon midnight, I should have set out to see him to the top of the street. As we went along, the cries would have broken out. I should have led him back—"

"Nothing," said Peter, "could be clearer. After the preliminary shock he would have been forced to confess that your draughtsmanship was a triumph of academic accuracy."

"I hope," said Mr. O'Halloran, "the performance may still go forward as originally intended." He looked with some anxiety at Peter, who replied, "I hope so, indeed. I also hope that your

uncle's heart is a strong one. But may I, in the meantime, signal to my unfortunate policeman and relieve his mind? He is in danger of losing his promotion through a suspicion that he was drunk on duty."

"Good God!" said Mr. O'Halloran. "No—I don't want that to happen. Fetch him in."

The difficulty was to make P.C. Burt recognize in the daylight what he had seen at night through the letter-flap. Of the framework of painted canvas, with its forms and figures oddly foreshortened and distorted, he could make little. Only when the thing was set up and lighted in the curtained studio was he at length convinced. "It's wonderful," he said. "It's like Maskelyne and Devant. I wish the sergeant could a-seen it."

"Lure him down here tomorrow night," said Mr. O'Halloran. "Let him come as my uncle's bodyguard. You," he turned to Peter, "you seem to have a way with policemen. Can't you inveigle the fellow along? Your impersonation of starving and disconsolate Bloomsbury is fully as convincing as mine. How about it?"

"I don't know," said Peter. "The costume gives me pain. Besides, is it kind to a p.b. policeman? I give you the R.A., but when it comes to the guardians of the law—damn it all! I'm a family man, and I must have *some* sense of responsibility."

★ ★ ★

CALORIE PIE

Whether or not you share Jack Sprat's prejudices, you should be able to make mincemeat of the following weighty problems—but if the scales are against you, turn on to page 94 for the answers.

1. *You are an adult man, engaged in very hard work. What should your daily calorific intake be? What would this be, given in terms of pounds of sausages?*

2. *Where did the phrase "fair, fat, and forty" originate?*

3. *Who was Friar Tuck (no, it wasn't he who said he would put his girdle round the earth, that was Puck), and has he any connection with tuckboxes?*

4. *Who* *i. objected to a fat white woman whom nobody loves;*
   ii. wanted men about him that were fat;
   iii. said, "Who drives fat oxen should himself be fat?"

5. *Who was i. Shakespeare's famous fat knight;*
   ii. Cervantes' famous thin one?

6. *While we are on the subject of weight-producing food, can you give the ingredients of a Bedfordshire Clanger?*

STRONG & SILENT

Deeds, not words shall speak me

JOHN FLETCHER

He'd gaze in her orbit of blue,
Her hand he would tenderly squeeze,
But the words of her tongue that he knew
Were limited strictly to these:

"Coralie Celestine Eulalie,
Houp la! Je vous aime, oui, mossoo,
Combien donnez-moi aujourd'hui,
Bonjour, mademoiselle, parlez-voo."

W. S. GILBERT, *Lorenzo de Lardy*

No Joke

"Bring me coffee, a boiled egg, toast, marmalade, and a tangerine," he said to the waiter. And he took an emery board out of his pocket and began filing his nails.

"So Mrs. Van Hopper has had enough of Monte Carlo," he said, "and now she wants to go home. So do I. She to New York and I to Manderley. Which would you prefer? You can take your choice."

"Don't make a joke about it; it's unfair," I said; "and I think I had better see about those tickets, and say good-bye now."

"If you think I'm one of the people who try to be funny at breakfast, you're wrong," he said. "I'm invariably ill-tempered in the early morning. I repeat to you, the choice is open to you. Either you go to America with Mrs. Van Hopper or you come home to Manderley with me."

"Do you mean you want a secretary or something?"

"No, I'm asking you to marry me, you little fool."

DAPHNE DU MAURIER, *Rebecca*

Pretty Fast

Primrose Hill is green
Primrose Hill is yellow.
As I walked on Primrose Hill
I met a pretty fellow.
We went up the Hill,
We went down the Valley,
We went through the Primroses
And he said, " Will you marry ? "

ELEANOR FARJEON,
Nursery Rhymes of London Town

Pitching Woo

" In fact, in many ways," proceeded Mr. Philips methodically, " we suit. Neither of us, for instance, is as young as we were. I may say I am forty-seven." He paused a moment.

" I don't suppose *you'll* ever see—well, thirty—again? "

Dolores shook her head . . .

" My position in the Insurance world may not be showy," continued Mr. Philips, " but it's safe; and I regularly qualify for a bonus. As to my general character and habits, you know all about them . . . Naturally you wouldn't want to leave this house of yours. Well, neither would I. With another lodger or two we could be very snug. Which brings me to another point. Martha. I don't say she isn't your niece—"

" Stop," ordered Dolores.

She had been sitting motionless so long, she was too stiff to spring to her feet; but she rose not without dignity, and to Mr. Philips' surprise in anger. What had he said to offend her? To make her stalk to the door like a tragedy queen? Mr. Philips hastily checked over his proposals—and saw at least an omission.

" Here, wait a bit! " cried Mr. Philips. " I'm ready to marry you! "

MARGERY SHARP, *The Eye of Love*

The women of Afghanistan go about unveiled, and a young man may choose a partner for himself without the aid of a matchmaker, or even of his parents. If some girl takes his fancy, all he has to do is to cut off a lock of her hair or throw a sheet over her, and proclaim the damsel is his bride. He must then make a bargain with the father before he is allowed to take her to his home.

H. N. HUTCHINSON, *Marriage Customs in Many Lands*

Sound Barrier

NERISSA *What say you, then, to Falconbridge, the young baron of England?*

PORTIA *You know I say nothing to him, for he understands not me, nor I him; he hath neither Latin, French, nor Italian; and you will come into the court and swear that I have but a poor pennyworth in the English. He is a proper man's picture, but, alas! who can converse with a dumb-show?*

WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE, *The Merchant of Venice*

Nuff Said

"Sit down, beauty, I have something to give you," said Lord Gifford, somewhat passionately. From his pocket he took a beautiful diamond ring and placed it on her finger. Then he said: "Now, my own! My loved one! You can go home."

AMANDA M. ROS, *Delina Delaney*

Prithee, Chloe, not so fast,
Let's not run and wed in haste;
We've a thousand things to do:
You must fly, and I pursue;
You must frown, and I must sigh;
I intreat, and you deny.

JOHN OLDMIXON

PHANTOM WARNING

Like a huge bat with outstretched wings
he pitched into space

BY HUGH B. CAVE

HE had that uneasy feeling again. It came when the man-made sounds of the construction camp subsided and those of the island jungle took over, when the lights went out and black Caribbean night crept down the walls of Janin Gorge.

Tonight the feeling would not leave him, and Tom Bickford stood listening at the door of his shack. Listening for what? A stealthy step, whispers, some sort of signal? One or all of those things, perhaps. Or nothing.

Bickford had warned Pierre Dejean, in charge of the work gang, to put an extra watchman on the dam tonight, with the job so nearly finished. But what if Dejean had chosen the wrong man? A native worker secretly employed by Jules Marnot would look like any other.

He turned to frown at the alarm clock on the home-made table by his bunk, his nerves nagged by its noisy ticking. One o'clock. He had to be on the job at daybreak, sleep or no, to begin the last pouring of concrete. Beside the clock stood a framed snapshot of a laughing girl in a tennis dress. He grinned back at her, but his grin was wry.

"Donna, if that doubting father of yours could see Tom Bickford now . . ."

The grin was short lived. He couldn't just stand here, waiting for something to happen and praying it wouldn't. He took his flashlight and quietly went out.

The night was black as Marnot's heart. A saboteur would love such a night. Eighty men slept within yelling distance, but even the grass-roofed shacks they slept in were invisible. Bickford descended to the river and walked upstream, feeling his way around boulders—hard work and slow, but more direct than climbing the canyon wall to the truck road. Just let him see the watchman's lanterns. The feeling would go away then and let him sleep.

Not much water in the river now. Only a dry-season trickle squeezing through the opening in the dam base, like sand through the waist of an hourglass. A month hence, when the drenchings began, the stream would be a thundering torrent. But by then the dam would be ready to contain it, storing the flood for later use in the sugar fields of the valley. Ready in time, despite all the mysterious breakdowns and accidents . . .

Bickford halted. Fifty feet high, the massive arch filled the gorge before him, concrete and steel sheathed in a corset of wooden forms. High on the catwalk the lights winked: glow-worms walking an invisible rope across the abyss. He lingered a moment to savour the triumph.

His own first sight of this mountain wilderness, months before, had made him shudder, he recalled.

Suddenly he held his breath. High above, one of the watchmen had halted to lean over the catwalk railing, the lantern out-thrust in space as he peered down. His voice, a sharp challenge, rang through the gorge.

" Who is that? What are you doing down there? "

The answer was abrupt. A flicker of flame at the base of the dam; the unexpected thunder of a revolver shot. The watchman pitched into space like a huge bat with outspread wings. Weirdly the lantern plummeted through the dark, while the walls of the gorge tossed a scream of terror back and forth.

With knots in his stomach, Bickford leapt forward.

The explosion came while he was still thirty yards from the barrier, at the very instant when he realized that the man at the base of the dam had slipped past him in the dark and would escape. One sullen blast ripped through the gorge; then a gale of wind between the canyon walls slammed him off his feet.

He fell among boulders, staggered up, and fell again when his knees buckled.

Fighting oblivion, he heard the landslide roar of shattered forms and concrete . . .

" Whoever did it is a better engineer than either of us," Dejean said with a glum head-shake. " The charge was evidently exactly placed to do the maximum damage." A slender, dark man in his early thirties, he stood at Bickford's side in the sunlight, scowling up at the jagged gash in the dam. " We're set back three weeks. More, if the workers are scared. Marnot will dance a jig in the capital today."

Bickford could find no words. Under a layer of bandage his head throbbed fiendishly where a flying rock fragment had laid open his scalp, but the greater ache was inside him.

Dejean was right. When told what had happened—and the telling would be almost certainly in the form of a report from the saboteur himself—Jules Marnot would rub his hands in triumph. For Tom Bickford, this was the end.

It was a forlorn business. In the beginning he had wanted no part in a job as full of risk as this one promised to be. Down on his luck, the Bickford Engineering Company all but ruined by a series of misfortunes, he had been determined to play safe and keep out of trouble. Behind him lay six months' work on a mountain road which, in the wink of an eye, had been wiped out by a landslide. Before that, four months of back-breaking toil on a pier and sea wall which had been tossed in his teeth, a mass of debris, by the worst tropical hurricane in years.

When bad luck backed a man against the ropes in such fashion, he lost more than money. He lost faith in himself. But then, with his mind made up to let Jules Marnot have the Janin Gorge job without a fight, Bickford had fallen in love—desperately in love—with Donna Richie.

He had met her the week after she returned from college in the States, when she came to him to extol the merits of a new truck her father was importing.

Bickford knew her father: a big man, admired and respected in his adopted country; a man who had come up the hard way, from nothing. He didn't know the girl. When he saw her that day for the first time, he was breaking ground for a small sisal plant on the city's outskirts—a small, safe job.

Flat on his back under a bulky bulldozer, his face puddled with oil, Bickford peered up at her. Nice legs, he thought. Once on his feet again, he discovered how very pretty she was, with honest brown eyes and a ready smile.

"A truck? The only truck this outfit needs right now is a nice slow hearse." Speculatively he stared at her, and then his grin came through the oil and grease like a sun through dark clouds. "Of course, if you went with the truck—"

Yes, she was extraordinarily pretty. Most American girls in the islands were running away from something back home. But Donna had been born here. She was practical like her father, and she still stopped to listen when black hands beat a drumhead in the shrouded hills.

Her mother was dead. It was her father Bickford had to deal with, and Everett Richie was a hard and difficult man.

"A year ago, Bickford, I would have been pleased to see you paying attention to my daughter. You were on the way up—a promising young engineer in a country where engineers are sorely needed. But not now. You're a bad risk."

"I didn't invent landslides and hurricanes," Bickford retorted.

"No, but you've let them lick you. I know what goes on, Bickford; it's my business to know. What you had, you've lost —and I don't mean money. You're scared. If my daughter marries you—and, mind you, she hasn't told me she wants to—she'd run the risk of being the wife of a beachcomber six months from now."

Richie spoke quietly, without rancour, but there was no mistaking the finality of his rejection. Had he been some other girl's father, Bickford might have been angry.

That same evening Bickford had a date with Donna. Driving her up the mountain road, high above the lights of the city, he stopped the car and turned to face her. "So you think I'm slipping," he said defensively.

The honest brown eyes looked at him levelly, and there was affection in them—perhaps more than affection—but uncertainty, too. "Do you remember what you said the day I tried to sell you a truck? You could use a hearse, you said."

"I was only joking," Bickford protested.

"Were you, Tom? Does a man say such a thing just to be funny?" She shook her head at him, slowly. "I'd like to believe my father is wrong, Tom. But *is* he?"

Bickford chewed his lip. He had known Donna Richie only a short time—a month or so—but he was sure of one thing. Donna was what he wanted. He had to have her.

"I'll show your father," he promised. "I'll show you both!"

"This is going to cost money, Mr. Bickford," Pierre Dejean said glumly. "Cleaning up this mess, rebuilding the forms—it will be expensive."

Bickford nodded, gazing at the rubble where grim-faced workers dug for the watchman's body. "I don't know where we're going to get the money," he said. "I couldn't borrow a sou. You know that. Marnot knows it, too. If he isn't with the Minister of Public Works right now, making arrangements to take over, then I'm very much mistaken."

Dejean had no answer. He knew well enough that Bickford had won the contract partly on bluff, accepting an intricate financing arrangement that left him no cushion to absorb set-backs. And the set-backs had been almost unending.

Nearly every day had brought some new, unforeseen expense—a bulldozer laid up through carelessness, a truck lost in the gorge when the road mysteriously crumbled. Small things, perhaps, when considered against the scope of the job itself. But small things hurt. The company was on its last legs, deep in debt.

There would be no further payment from the government until the job was finished and approved.

Bickford recalled the morning, months ago, when he had signed the contract and a bitterly disappointed Jules Marnot had extended a limp hand in congratulation. Marnot's smile had been polite enough. He was an immaculate man who concealed his feelings behind impeccable manners. But his words—"I wish you success, monsieur, in an undertaking full of risk"—had tightened the muscles of Bickford's stomach.

Jules Marnot was influential, and in a country of this sort it was suicide to antagonize a local magnate of his importance unless you had solid backing. Now, gazing at the wreckage, Bickford realized how vulnerable he was.

He turned away. The blast of a car hooter halted him. On the lorry road at the edge of the gorge a car had stopped. Donna Richie, her yellow bandanna shining like a great gold coin in the sunlight, looked down and waved.

Bickford disconsolately lifted a hand in answer and trudged back to camp.

Donna was waiting when he got there. Catching his hand as he toiled up the path from the river, she said anxiously, "Tom, what happened?"

"Dam blown up. Watchman killed." Bickford did not feel like talking. It was good to have her here, but he was too much aware of the silence behind her. The men stood around in small groups, waiting to find out what he would do. Most of them knew the score.

"I came out to congratulate you," Donna said, staring wide-eyed at the bandage on his head. Her fingers trembled, dug into his wrist. "You told me last week—"

"I was out of my mind." Last week, on a visit to the capital, he had flung caution to the winds and told her the battle was won. He was paying for his idiocy now. The look in her eyes—

The look did something to him that all his thinking had failed to do. He gripped the girl's arms. "We're going back to the city," he said fiercely.

"Now? But what—"

"I can't do anything here. We need lumber, cement. Most of all we need money." He swung to face Dejean, who stood watching. "Pierre, take over till I get back. Talk to the men. Find out who murdered that watchman."

"Tomorrow is pay day," Dejean warned.

"The money is in the safe."

"Yes. But if they work after that—"

"They'll be paid. I'll get it somewhere." With Donna hurrying after him, Bickford strode to her car and crammed himself behind the wheel.

From camp to capital was a six-hour drive usually. This time the chickens and donkeys on the dusty roads had to shift for themselves and the trip took four hours and a half. While driving Bickford worked out a list of prospects in his mind. Friends, mostly. He dropped Donna off at her home in the suburbs.

"See you this evening." For an instant he clung to her hand, hating to let her go. "And don't count me out too soon!"

But when he drove the car into her driveway again it was midnight, and the mask of despair was back on his face. "I've been all over town," he admitted, sinking wearily into a verandah chair. "All over, Donna. No one has any faith in Tom Bickford." With an effort he turned to glance towards the doorway. "Where's your father?"

"He went to bed, Tom."

"I thought he'd wait up, to gloat. Well, I'm not licked yet. I missed some of the names on my list. Tomorrow—"

"Come inside, Tom," she said. "I'll make some coffee. It may help."

The next day was worse. The knockout punch was delivered at the club by an American whose sugar holdings would double in value when the dam was completed.

"Why should I risk my money needlessly, Bickford? We'll get our dam. Sure, it will cost the government three times what it should by the time Marnot runs through his repertoire of tricks. But we'll get it. With you on the job we won't. Jules Marnot never gives up."

Donna's father was not in bed when Bickford returned to the house that evening. Seated with Donna on the verandah, smoking his pipe, he rose gravely to shake Bickford's hand, then sat again to listen to the bitter tale of failure. He was a good listener.

The house boy brought Bickford a drink, and while he sipped it Everett Richie appraisingly stared at him. Then, "How much do you need?" Richie asked.

The glass almost slipped from Bickford's fingers. "What?"

"How much will it cost to repair the damage and finish the job?"

"I've been trying to raise fifty thousand."

Richie frowned. He was well off now, but there had been times when fifty thousand had seemed as unattainable as the moon. He sucked at his pipe for a moment, his gaze fixed in space. Then, frowning, he leaned forward.

"I don't have that much, of course. Not that I can put my hands on. But I can raise it, I believe. I can persuade others to back you."

Bickford knew who was responsible for the man's change of heart. His own heart thumped wildly as he swung about to face Donna. But Donna was gazing at her father in wide-eyed astonishment.

"She hasn't been talking to me," Richie said quietly, "if that's what you're thinking."

"Then why—?"

The man put down his pipe and fixed Bickford with a steady frown. "The moment you won the contract for the Janin Gorge Dam, Bickford, this undertaking ceased to be a personal matter, as far as I was concerned."

He paused, as though searching for words to express his meaning. "I happen to love this country, and by the country I mean the people in it—the real people, who walk barefoot on the country roads, not the Marnot breed who squeeze the national treasury dry to stock their cellars with champagne. I want that dam finished—not for the sugar plantations owned by foreigners, but for the peasants in the valley who have to walk ten miles for water when the river dries up."

This was a side of Everett Richie that Bickford had never seen before. The passionate sincerity of the man numbed him, and for a moment he could find no words. Then he stood up with his hand out-thrust. "Thanks for the offer, Mr. Richie. You won't regret it, I promise you."

His hand hung unsteadily in space until Donna's father at last leaned forward to clasp it.

Bickford drove back to camp in Donna's car, and in answer to his triumphant yell as he jumped out, Pierre Dejean appeared in the doorway of the headquarters shack.

"Got it!" Bickford exulted. "The lumber and cement are on their way. What have you done here?"

"Cleaned up the rubble," Dejean said. "But I'm worried, Mr. Bickford."

"About what?"

Dejean drew him aside. "I have questioned the men, all of them. One at a time I had them in here and put them through it. He is clever, the fellow who shot that watchman and wrecked the dam. I don't know how we are to smoke him out."

"You think he'll make trouble again?"

"Jules Marnot is a tenacious man."

Bickford was thoughtful. "We can't fire them all; it would

take too long to replace them. He'll find it a lot tougher next time, though. Come on, let's get the show on the road."

Three weeks, Dejean had predicted. The work had to be completed sooner than that, or it would run past the contract deadline and there would be a maze of red tape through which Jules Marnot might find a way to accomplish his ends. Bickford called the workers to him. "Two weeks," he told them. "That's all we have—two weeks. Every one of you must work harder than he knows how to."

He showed them how hard a human being could work. On the job before dawn each morning, he drove himself unmercifully until darkness sent him staggering back to camp. Then after an hour or two of rest and a supper he was usually too tired to eat, he was back in another role—the role of sentry.

"You'll kill yourself!" Dejean remonstrated. "Night after night without sleep—you can't keep it up. Surely we can find at least one watchman we can trust!"

"The only man I trust on that dam at night is myself," Bickford retorted. But Dejean was right; he was killing himself. After a week of it his hand would not hold a razor steady enough for him to shave. Days, when the heat rose in waves from the concrete, he found himself reeling between canyon walls that blazed red with imagined flames. And at night . . .

Patrolling that lofty, foot-wide catwalk at night, with a rifle clutched in his hands, did things to his nerves. The wind moaning through the gorge kept him on edge, jumpy. The trickle of water among the river-bed boulders had a score of voices, some of which brought him up short and held him rigid for moments at a time, peering into the dark in search of phantoms. He could have sworn he heard footsteps and whispers.

He kept awake on his sentry duty by thinking of Donna, and sometimes by talking aloud to her. "This is for you, Donna." But not only for you, he thought. Your father was right. This is for the people of the valley, too. The peasants who lose their land and livestock every rainy season when the river runs wild. Who have to subsist on filthy water from ditches all through the dry spells. This is for them.

The nights were long. And lonely. But he got a lot of thinking done during the dark hours. He came to understand and admire Everett Richie in a way that made him glad, for a new reason, to be in love with the daughter of such a man. He came to think of his own workmen not as nameless, barefoot men, wielding shovels, but human beings who knew hunger and weariness, laughed and wept, married and had children.

There was a morning when, returning to camp from his all-night

vigil, he went to the widow of the dead watchman and talked to her for more than an hour . . . and, on leaving, emptied his pockets and pressed money into her hands, and told her he was sorry he had so little.

I wish I could talk to you, he thought. But it was Donna's father, not Donna herself, who showed up on the tenth day.

Bickford, supervising the pouring of concrete, saw the car on the truck road and signalled Dejean to take over. He shook Everett Richie's hand as the man wearily wriggled from behind the wheel. There was something on Richie's mind, he realized. Something grave, revealed in the man's worried eyes and drawn mouth.

Together, in silence, they stood at the edge of the gorge, gazing at the massive wall of steel and concrete.

"You will be able to finish it?" Richie asked at last.

"Day after tomorrow we'll have the inauguration ceremony, Mr. Richie. I've already sent word to the capital." Bickford could not keep the triumph out of his voice. Despite the endless days and sleepless nights, he still had something left.

"Tom"—it was the first time Donna's father had called him that—"when will you be paid?"

"Pollard, the Public Works man, is to bring the cheque with him." Bickford glanced anxiously at Richie's lined face. "Why?"

"I'm in trouble. Serious trouble, Tom." Richie took in a deep breath and laid a hand on Bickford's arm. "Jules Marnot was furious when he learned that I'd raised money for you. He would have killed me, I think, had he dared. Now he has bought up a note I signed—one I had every reason to believe would be extended. It falls due next week. This morning he told me he would present it for payment."

"Marnot!" Bickford muttered. The name had a poisonous taste on his tongue.

"He means to smash me, Tom. If anything goes wrong—if you're not able to repay at least my part of the loan—I lose my business. Marnot is a vicious man."

"Mr. Richie, nothing is going wrong here," Bickford said grimly. "You'll have your money the day after tomorrow."

He gripped the man's arm and turned him towards the car. "Go down to the camp and rest. Stay here with us till this is finished."

Richie's only reply was a silent nod.

The big rains were not due for a month, but here in the mountains the weather seldom ran to form. At two the next morning Bickford became aware of a restless note in the wind's moaning.

He halted on the catwalk to listen. His thoughts had been on his responsibility to Donna's father.

A fat drop of water splashed on his sleeve. Another struck his upturned face. All at once a clap of thunder burst the black barrel of the heavens and a deluge descended.

At two-thirty, soaked to the skin and jumpy from the incessant flashes of lightning, he saw a figure stumbling up the road towards him. It was Dejean, a raincoat flapping about his legs.

"I got scared about you, Mr. Bickford. You should go back to camp. In such weather there is no need to stay here!"

"Not on your life. I'm staying."

"Then I stay with you."

By the flashes of lightning they watched the river rise on the upstream side of the barrier. There was no coffer dam to halt it. Gambling on getting the job finished before the season of daily downpours, Bickford had left an opening in the base of the dam for the river's normal dry-season trickle to pass through. That opening was plugged now with concrete. Swiftly at first, then not so swiftly, the swollen stream backed up into the gorge.

By six o'clock the impounded lake had attained a depth of eight feet on the gauge, and in dreary daylight Bickford peered over the upstream rim. "Look at it, Pierre!" he exulted. "Water! Tons of water for the peasants of the valley when they need it."

Dejean looked at him strangely. "Mr. Bickford," he said, "I have worked for you a long time, but I guess I never knew you. Or else—well, perhaps you have changed."

Bickford looked down at the hand out-thrust at him, glanced up at Dejean's solemn face, and gripped the hand.

Intermittently the rain fell. Behind the wall of concrete the lake in the gorge steadily deepened. But the work went on. The long wet hours were filled with the wheeze and clank of the mixers. The last forms were in place. Concrete flowed for the last time.

When Monsieur Pollard, the Minister of Public Works, arrived with his official party, Bickford was ready.

A surprise was in store for him. Out of one of the cars stepped Donna. Her eyes shining, she came straight to him and put her hands on his shoulders. "Tom, I'm proud," she said. "So proud!"

Bickford, his weariness gone, turned back to the official group just as another car rolled into camp. Out of it calmly stepped an immaculate figure he had not seen since the day the contract was signed. Jules Marnot!

The skin crawled on Bickford's ribs.

Marnot, coming towards him, was all smiles. " My warmest congratulations, Mr. Bickford," he murmured. " Nothing stops you, I see."

" Nothing has yet." Bickford coldly returned his gaze. " Not even—" He shrugged it off, the word " murder " still unspoken. Let it go, he thought.

But Marnot's presence made him uneasy. A man who never admitted defeat couldn't be counted out while time remained for him to strike another blow. Bickford kept a wary eye on him while escorting the group to the dam.

He was not the only apprehensive one. While the others paraded over the structure, marvelling at the depth of water already impounded, Everett Richie halted at Bickford's side. His fingers, Bickford noticed, had trouble getting a cigarette out of a packet.

" Tom—what right has Marnot to be here? "

" He's a big wheel, Mr. Richie. We can't make a fuss."

" He's up to something. That man is always up to something! "

Pollard, the minister, approached them, smiling. " Monsieur Bickford, I congratulate you." He pumped Bickford's hand. " A magnificent job. And on time! "

" Ahead of time," Bickford said. " But I trust I'm to be paid promptly . . . ? "

" With the greatest pleasure I shall hand you a cheque at the inauguration ceremony tomorrow morning."

One more night, Bickford thought. One more lonely night of watching the shadows and listening to the wail of the wind. He had to return to camp with Pollard and the rest. Had to sit at supper with them. But after the first cognac was poured, he broke away.

" I've some reports to write. You know how it is."

Donna followed him out, and in front of his own shack she faced him. " Tom," she said, " I'm frightened."

" I'm scared myself, darling."

" If anything should happen now—"

" It won't. Go on back. Keep an eye on Marnot. If he makes any suspicious move, I'll be at the dam."

He watched her return through the darkness, then stepped into his own place for his rifle and flashlight. Odd. Even here he had the feeling something was not quite right.

He thumbed the flashlight switch and directed the beam round the room, over bunk, table, chairs. His nerves, probably. With so much at stake, he was imagining things. Still, the room was

unnaturally quiet, as if holding its breath in anticipation of trouble . . .

He shook the feeling off, turned, and went out. The camp sounds died away behind him. Alone in the rain he made his way along the muddy river path.

He must have had a sixth sense, or else the lonely all-night vigils had sharpened the other five. There was no sound, really. No movement. Yet suddenly he flicked the light off and dropped to a crouch, and with the skin crawling under his clammy clothes, worked his way clear of the path to a pocket among the boulders.

Only then could he be sure. Bare feet slapped softly on the wet stones. From the base of the dam a shadow glided towards him.

The watchman was above, on the catwalk. No man should be here in the river bed at this hour. Silently Bickford adjusted rifle and flashlight, and tensed his legs for a leap. The shadow loomed large, moving swiftly. He stopped it with a stabbing shaft of light and looked over the gun barrel into a face quick-frozen with fatalistic lack of expression.

"Not so fast. I want to talk to you!"

The man shivered once, and then was still as stone. Bickford stepped closer. It was one of the workers, a thin-faced man named Valcin who earned an extra few dollars a week by sweeping out the camp buildings when his day's stint was done.

"What are you doing here this time of night?"

"Nothing, msié." A shrug. "Only looking for something I lost."

"For what?"

"A knife. It fell from my pocket this afternoon." His recovery had been quick. His tone was insolent. "I paid a whole dollar for it. Would you expect me to leave it here?"

"A dollar is a lot of money," Bickford said coldly. "We'll look for the knife together. Unless," he added, watching the man's eyes, "you've planted another charge of dynamite and don't want to be blown to bits."

Without a word the workman turned and began walking.

At the foot of the concrete wall Bickford halted. A beam of light fastened on him from above, and the anxious voice of the watchman followed it down. "Is that you, Mr. Bickford?"

"Yes, Lelio. This man has been prowling. Did you hear anything?"

The light wavered. "No, msié. Nothing."

Valcin saw me coming, Bickford thought. He was up to something but saw my light down the gorge and thought he could get

past me in the dark. Stepping close to the prowler, he ran a hand over the man's clothing, found only cigarettes and a box of matches. Again he looked up. "Lelio!"

"Msié?"

"Keep awake. I'll be back when I've taken this man to camp." He motioned with the rifle. "Get going, Valcin. Fast."

He wondered what to do with the fellow. Third-degree him to put the finger on Jules Marnot, where it undoubtedly belonged? That would take time. For now, the best move was to lock him up, say nothing, and let Marnot do the sweating. This night could not last for ever.

He avoided the headquarters building where, by the sounds, the cognac was still flowing. In Dejean's quarters a light burned. Bickford steered his prisoner to the doorway and found the foreman inside, quietly reading a newspaper.

"Caught him prowling in the gorge," Bickford said. "What he was up to I don't know; evidently I scared him out of it. Take care of him, Pierre. I've got to get back there."

Well, the night would pass now. There'd be no more trouble. But on the path to the river, Bickford halted again. That nagging uneasiness . . .

Impulsively he strode to his shack and pushed open the door. Empty. The same odd stillness. His light licked over floor and walls, swept the table, stopped, and swung back. He stared wide-eyed at Donna's picture.

He knew.

"Pierre!" He skidded to a halt at Dejean's door, saw the prisoner roped on a chair and the foreman bending over him. "Come with me. Quick!" At the locked door of the supply shed a few yards beyond, he wasted precious seconds fumbling for the right key, while Dejean pounded up behind him.

"What is it, Mr. Bickford? What—"

Bickford threw his weight against the flimsy door and smashed it open, his light probing the array of tools and mounds of boxes. "We had four cases of dynamite, Pierre!"

"Four. Yes." Dejean took a step forward, stopped. His breath hissed. "One is gone!"

"That devil stole a key to this place. He's planted a time bomb at the dam. Pierre—the people in the valley! If all that water hits them without warning—" Bickford flung the foreman out of the way and ran. "Phone the dam," he yelled over his shoulder. "Tell the watchman to clear out."

"Mr. Bickford, you can't go up there," Dejean wailed after him. "The bomb may go off!"

Bickford didn't stop.

It would have been safer to climb to the truck road. Then if the thing went off he would not be trapped between canyon walls in the path of the flood. But moments counted. Perhaps even seconds. The river route was shorter.

Shorter? He ran until his lungs must burst, and it was like racing in a nightmare along a path without end. Never had the river route seemed so long. Ahead, high in the dark, a light sped along the catwalk . . . the watchman scurrying to safety. Then there was nothing. Only the towering mass of concrete and the tunnel of rock through which the water must pour at tremendous, annihilating speed.

He covered the last ten yards in a stagger of exhaustion, sagged against the concrete, and listened. It would be such a small sound in that place! Hearing nothing, he fell to his hands and knees and began crawling along the wall.

Slow . . . slow . . . There would be no time to go back and do it again if he missed. Every instinct cried for haste, but he must crawl at a snail's pace and strain to hear the sound. His lungs wheezed. His heart pounded. The wind moaned between the canyon walls. He heard nothing else.

Journey in a nightmare, on hands and knees, and no end to it. No end! He could feel the moments slipping away from him like knots in a rope he could not hold. Precious moments, escaping so fast. He heard voices and looked up against his will.

Car lights on the truck road revealed a cluster of human figures at the edge of the gorge. Donna, her father, Pierre Dejean. The minister and his group. They shouted at him to come up. But he had no time for them. Head down, he crawled on again, listening. He heard.

The muffled sound came from a cairn of boulders at the dam base, just ahead. Almost no sound at all, only a tinny heartbeat —tunk, tunk, tunk. He threw himself at it and tore the boulders aside, got his hands on the thing, and staggered to his feet.

It was so harmless in itself. Only a cheap alarm clock, wired to batteries in a wooden box—a clock stolen by the saboteur from the table near Bickford's bed. He stared at it in silence while the reaction came and sweat ran into his eyes. Then, shaking with relief, he looked up at the people on the rim of the gorge and weakly waved a hand.

" Gentlemen," said Monsieur Pollard, the Minister of Public Works, " I propose to make this dedication very brief. We are emotionally exhausted, all of us. Last night, as you know, an enemy of the state attempted to destroy this magnificent structure, and had it not been for the great courage of Monsieur Bickford—"

He saw the look on Bickford's face and stopped, then grinned. Perhaps the grin stemmed from his memory of Jules Marnot's abortive attempt to escape last night, after Valcin had mumbled a confession. Pollard himself, despite his lofty position, had halted the fleeing man with a magnificent flying tackle.

" I talk too much, eh, monsieur? " He gripped Bickford's hand. " Well, let the others thank you for themselves. I thank you for my government, and for my wife and children. Monsieur "—no smile now—" you do not know it—last night you did not know it—but my own family lives in the valley only a mile below here."

The minister stepped back, plucked an envelope from his pocket, and thrust it into Bickford's hand. " Your cheque, monsieur. It should be signed by all the people of our country."

It was neatly put, Bickford decided. He wished he had the knack himself, so that he could answer it in kind. Well, he was an engineer. They wouldn't expect too much.

He raised his clasped hands over his head and grinned, then turned, and took Donna in his arms.

In front of them all he kissed her.

A PATRICK PETRELLA STORY

MISS BELL'S STOCKING

" Most old bints go barmy," said Peggs
" one way or another "

BY MICHAEL GILBERT

IT was widely known in Highside—in certain circles at least—that Miss Bell had a stocking. When such circles speak of a stocking, they are not thinking of that useful and often elegant arrangement of silk or nylon which covers the southern end of a lady; they mean a private store of ready money, in bank-notes or coin of the realm, secreted in a shoe-box or a dispatch case or a tin trunk, and placed, for greater safety, under the owner's bed.

Detective Sergeant Petrella knew about Miss Bell's stocking. He had heard about it from Square Peggs, the proprietor of the all-night café.

" She's barmy," said Peggs. " There's nothing in that. Most old bints go barmy, one way or another, after a certain age. It's their metabolisms." He paused to absorb a bismuth tablet, for his own digestive metabolism left much to be desired.

" I heard she keeps it in a cage."

" A cage? "

" It's the cage she keeps her old parrot, Joey, in. Got a false bottom."

Petrella choked over his coffee.

" It's no laughing matter," said Peggs sourly. " *And* you know perfectly well what I mean."

" Yes," said Petrella. " Quite so. Just for a moment I couldn't help picturing—but never mind. Where did she get it all from? "

" She got it from her Pa—Colonel Bell. He was an inventor. Invented a gadget for cutting things off with. Very popular in Edwardian times."

" Cutting things off? "

" Fingernails, corns, cigar-ends, anything you like to mention.

She showed me one once. In snakeskin, with a silver finish. *Bell's Collapsible Cutter.* What the Society man takes on a picnic to Cowes or Ascot. Use it to cut bread for sandwiches, a lock of your loved one's hair, or your nephew off with a shilling."

"Peggs," said Petrella, "you're making it up."

"Cross my heart, I'm not. I'd have bought one myself, only this was the only one she had left. Very useful in the restaurant trade, a collapsible cutter."

"Tell me about that stocking. How big is it?"

"Over five hundred nicker, I heard. Money her Pa left to her. She doesn't touch it. Lives on a pension, more'n she wants. Adds to it from time to time."

Petrella found nothing incredible in that. He himself had once had the job of clearing up the garret room of an elderly recluse who had died of slow starvation and, examining the ticking of his pitiful mattress before consigning it to the flames, had found it packed with bank-notes, savings certificates, and securities, mostly so filthy and so tightly packed together as to be almost indecipherable.

"I suppose a lot of people know about it," he said.

"These things get round," said Peggs. "You know how it is. I fancy I saw Gentleman Jackson calling there the other day. Nice line in motor cars parked outside. Hired by the day, of course. I thought you oughter know."

"Thanks very much," said Petrella. "Yes, indeed." He made up his mind that the sooner he paid a call on Miss Bell the better. For Gentleman Jackson was a character whose fame extended even outside Q Division, in which he chiefly operated.

Nature had endowed Mr. Jackson with thick, greying hair on top of that sort of clean-cut, long-chinned face that looks out at you from the heart-warming advertisements of Bank Trustee Departments: *Let the Eastminster Bank take the Cares of Executorship from your Shoulders.* Jackson was born to take cares from people's shoulders. It was his speciality. In the process he often took quite a lot of money from their pockets as well, but in such a distinguished and such a considerate way that his victims often felt quite reconciled to their loss.

"I'll call on her tomorrow," said Petrella.

"You are a modern man, Sergeant Petrella," said Miss Bell, pouring China tea from a silver pot into a Rockingham china cup, "with modern ideas."

"I suppose so," said Petrella.

"And you think that I'm an old frump."

"Certainly not," said Petrella. "It's a very nice room."

"Overcrowded, I fear, and a lot of work keeping all the brass clean. But I wouldn't be without it."

Petrella scrutinized the room carefully.

"It would almost seem," said Miss Bell, "as if there were *something you expected to find here but did not see.*"

Petrella blushed. "I'd heard," he said, "that you kept a parrot."

Miss Bell seemed genuinely surprised.

"I once had a stuffed mongoose," she said, "but it moulted sadly. Never a parrot, as far as I can recollect. And my memory is as good as ever it was."

"I'm sure it is," said Petrella.

"And I am sure you didn't come to talk about parrots."

Petrella told her exactly what he had come to talk about, and Miss Bell heard him out in silence, except for an occasional clucking noise which might have been encouragement or mild surprise.

At the end she said, "I was aware, of course, that Mr. Jackson was a fraudulent character."

"You were?"

"He told me that he was a solicitor. My father was always very careful in such matters. He possessed, and left to me, a volume called *The Law List*, in which all solicitors are arranged in alphabetical order. Only one Jackson appears, and he is practising as you can see, in Weston-super-Mare."

Petrella read the entry; and observed also that it was a *Law List* for the year 1898. However, as long as Miss Bell was forewarned, that was all that really mattered.

"I take it he is putting up some proposition to you."

"Certainly," said Miss Bell. "And a most interesting one. An Australian financier—he started life as a sheep-worrier, whatever that may be—has entrusted to him a large fund of ready money. I forget if it was fifteen thousand or a hundred and fifty thousand pounds. He had instructions to hand over to charity, out of it, five times as much as he can collect from donors in this country. If he collects a hundred pounds from me, then he immediately gives five hundred pounds to a worthy charity here. I am particularly interested in the Highside Branch of the International Goodfellowship Society, and I was gratified to find that this was on his list. Wasn't that a coincidence?"

"It was indeed," said Petrella. "Have you—?"

"I was cautious, of course. But he disarmed me. The money is not to be paid to him, but directly to the Society. He is calling on me tomorrow evening. He will bring five hundred pounds with him, as a sign of good faith, as he put it. Not that I needed

a sign. We shall place it, together with a hundred pounds of my money, in an envelope, and I shall myself address it and post it —is that not business-like?—to the secretary of the Society."

Petrella wondered exactly what the secretary would say when he received the envelope full of folded pieces of newspaper which, he had no doubt at all, Mr. Jackson planned to substitute at the last moment. He said, " It sounds an excellent scheme. But tell me—do you really keep such a lot of ready money in your own house? "

" Certainly," said Miss Bell.

" Whereabouts do you keep it? "

Miss Bell looked at him hard. " And what did you say your name was? "

" Petrella."

" That's a foreign name."

" It's Spanish, actually."

" You're an English policeman. Why should you have a foreign name? "

" I got it from my father."

" I see. And you are—I think you said—a detective sergeant, working in this district."

" Division."

" I beg your pardon, division." Miss Bell was busy with the telephone directory. She dialled a number which Petrella, from where he sat, identified as the number of Crown Road Police Station.

" Could I speak to the person in charge? "

" This is the Station Sergeant speaking, ma'am."

" Have you on your staff a detective sergeant called Petrella? "

" Certainly, ma'am."

" Is he a young man—" she regarded him, her head on one side. She seemed to be enjoying herself—" with blue eyes and black hair, and a somewhat juvenile air? "

" That sounds like him," agreed the Station Sergeant. " What's he been up to? "

" Nothing at all," said Miss Bell, and rang off. " My father taught me never to take people at their own valuation."

" If you're quite happy about me now," said Petrella tartly, " perhaps you could answer my question."

" Of course."

Miss Bell hopped up, and walked across to a large brass-bound, teak-wood chest which stood underneath the window. It was the sort of thing that might have served for keeping logs in, except that it had an elaborate domed lid, which was shut.

" Open it for yourself," she said.

The lid was exceedingly heavy, but it moved up freely enough. The interior of the chest was lined with some sweet-smelling Indian wood; and it was empty. Petrella felt cautiously down the sides. They did not seem thick enough to contain any secrets.

"Now shut it again, and let me try."

Before she lifted the lid Petrella saw her do something to the handle. It was too quick for him to see precisely what she did, but this time the lid came up very easily, leaving behind it, in the top of the chest, a tray.

And it was full of bank-notes. Petrella looked at them curiously. They were of all ages. Greenbacks and brownbacks, Bradburys and Fishers, a few of the old white five-pound notes, and some of the recent issue as well.

Petrella found it difficult to tell how many there were in the chest, but there must have been at least a thousand pounds, probably more.

Miss Bell closed down the lid, which shut with a click, and returned to her chair.

"That was made by my father," she said. "He showed me the secret of the handle just before he died."

"Has it ever occurred to you," said Petrella, "how much money you're losing keeping it like this?"

"Losing?"

"Well, interest. Income."

"I have plenty of income. Why should I need any more?"

"You're not only losing income, you're losing capital as well. Do you realize that the pound note has depreciated in value so much that a pound in 1939 is only worth eight shillings now?"

Miss Bell looked at him pityingly.

"You're talking about the pounds in banks," she said. "The sort they give you in exchange for your cheques. I know all about them. Of course, they go down and down. It's something the banks arrange among themselves, so that when they come to pay you back the money you've been silly enough to lend them, they won't have to pay you so much."

"But—"

"How anyone could be taken in by so childish a trick, I can't imagine."

"But your money is just the same as theirs."

"Of course it isn't. Their money has gone down and down. Mine is just the same as it was when it was first put away. My pounds are still pounds."

"But—"

"And they're not only as valuable as they were when I first

got them, there are more of them! Have you ever heard of that happening in a bank account?"

Petrella could think of nothing to say to that.

At eight o'clock the following evening he was sitting in the front of a shabby tradesman's van that did not in the least resemble a police vehicle, although in fact it was equipped with a receiving- and transmitting-set. He was watching Miss Bell's front door.

He had seen the gentlemanly Mr. Jackson go in. Miss Bell had let him in herself; there was evidently no resident servant. The light was shining from the uncurtained bow window of the first-floor drawing-room. If anyone had approached the window to raise the lid of the great brass-bound chest, he was confident that he would have seen them. Miss Bell might, of course, have got the money out, ready, beforehand. In any event it would be better to stop Jackson on his way out, with the fruits of his nefarious sleight of hand actually on him.

So Petrella thought, and so he waited, patiently.

Mr. Jackson was also a man of patience. Seated in that charming, if old-fashioned, drawing-room, he had listened, with apparent interest, to Miss Bell's views on economics, the National Debt, bimetallism, the Gold Standard, and the appalling dishonesty of bank managers; but when nine o'clock struck, and then half past nine, he felt that it was time to proceed to business.

"Very interesting," he said. "Very interesting indeed. And now—"

He extracted from the inner pocket of his coat a bulky wallet. It was specially made of a plastic material which had the advantage, from his point of view, of being nearly but not quite transparent. When he laid it open on the desk, it could be seen to be divided into two pockets, each of which contained fifty five-pound notes. Or appeared to do so. The top and bottom notes on each side were absolutely genuine. The remaining ninety-six, if not quite genuine, were nothing so crude as torn-up strips of newspaper. They were a type of note which those who know the ropes can purchase at about ten for a pound, and which have a legitimate use as stage money, and a fairly legitimate use where an ostentatious show of wealth is required.

"There, dear lady," said Mr. Jackson. "My pledge is fulfilled. Count them if you wish."

"I am quite prepared to trust you," said Miss Bell, with a smile.

"Then let me add to them your contribution of one hundred pounds, place all in this envelope, and post it at once to the Goodfellowship Society. What a surprise for the secretary when

he receives it. If we hurry, we shall just catch the last post."

Still Miss Bell hesitated. "I suppose I am justified," she said, "in making such a large contribution."

"Reflect," said Mr. Jackson, "that every pound you withhold must mean that five pounds of this money is withdrawn."

"Oh dear. When you put it like that it sounds almost as if I am robbing them."

"Think of the cause."

"Well—" said Miss Bell.

She did not hear it, nor did Mr. Jackson. But Simba, her old and crafty Persian cat, heard it, and removed herself delicately from the rug in front of the fire and jumped on to the back of the sofa to be out of harm's way. A stealthy creaking of the loose board in the passage. A hissing of breath.

Then the door opened, and two men shouldered their way abruptly into the room. The leader was a tall, thin man with iron-grey hair, a weather-beaten face, and two very long, very pointed incisor teeth, one on either side of the front of his mouth. He was known in criminal circles as Wolf Chops, and he was a very unpleasant character indeed. Behind him came a second man, half as high, but twice as broad. His name was Danny and he suffered from epileptic fits. Between fits he earned a precarious living by robbery with violence.

"You go and keep an eye open for trouble," said Wolf to Danny. "I can deal with this little lot, don't you worry."

Danny appeared to understand this. He backed out, bubbling a little as he went.

"To what do I owe the pleasure?" said Miss Bell.

Wolf addressed Mr. Jackson. "I don't want a bit of trouble from you, Jacko," he said. "Your act's over. You can scarper. Or sit quiet and watch the fun. I don't mind which."

"Tell this man to go away, Mr. Jackson," said Miss Bell calmly. "I can't think how he got in at all. You must have left the door open."

"Really," said Mr. Jackson, in a voice from which most of the assurance had gone, "I think this intrusion is quite uncalled for."

Wolf took hold of the telephone, jerked it bodily out of the wall, and threw it on the sofa, narrowly missing Simba, who retreated with a hiss to the top of the bookcase.

"Tell him to go," said Miss Bell. "At once."

"I—" said Mr. Jackson.

"If you won't keep quiet, that's your lookout," said Wolf. His foot jerked up on to Mr. Jackson's bottom waistcoat button.

Mr. Jackson said, "Aaagh," as the air left him, and doubled over. This brought his chin into the right position for Wolf to

hit it, which he did, with a fist covered in some curious device of leather and steel.

Mr. Jackson went over on his back, rocking the bookcase as he fell. Simba transferred herself nimbly to the pelmet.

Miss Bell sat bolt upright in her chair.

"That was unforgivable," she said, "to strike a man so much older than yourself."

Wolf hitched himself forward until he was within distance of Miss Bell. He was in command of the situation and felt comfortable. This old lady wasn't behaving quite true to form. Most old ladies, by this time, would have been screaming, or cowering in a corner with their hands over their heads; but the fact that she was doing neither did not make Miss Bell appear any more formidable to Wolf. He was a man of very limited imagination which, when one considers some of the things he had done from time to time, to people who were in his power, was probably just as well for him.

"Now," he said, breathing heavily in Miss Bell's face, "you saw what happened to him. So don't let's have any lip from you. Just open up, and we'll take it quietly."

"Open what up?"

"Now don't argue. You've got money here. In notes. A lot of it. I know, see. You hand it over, and we won't hurt you. You hold out on us and I'll call Danny in, and we'll pull you to bits. You know what this is?"

His free hand went down and came up again. In it was a curious weapon. Basically it was a potato. Embedded in it, with a quarter of an inch of blue steel exposed, was a safety razor-blade.

"A collapsible cutter," said Miss Bell, in a far-away voice.

"I call it a shiv," said Wolf. "And I'll give you the shivers with it. And anyone else who sees you when I've done with you."

"I won't—"

"Look, lady," said Wolf, and an earnest note had crept into his voice, "either you open up, or I open you up. It's as easy as that. One of them's got to happen."

Wolf was wrong. What happened next was that Mr. Jackson, having extracted a small, Italian-made, automatic pistol from his pocket, started shooting from where he lay on the floor. The first shot carried away a crystal cluster from the chandelier, the second embedded itself in the wall above the fireplace, and the third hit Wolf slap in the middle of the face.

The noise of the firing caused two immediate reactions. Danny, who had the simple instinct of self-preservation well developed, departed out of the scullery window by which he and

Wolf had entered. Petrella jumped out of the van, shocked and horrified by this sudden development, for he had no idea that Jackson and Miss Bell were not alone in the house, and could not conceive why either of them should be shooting at the other. The front door was locked, but he circled the house, found the scullery window open, and went through it, missing Danny by about five seconds.

Upstairs he found Jackson sitting on the floor, his head in his hands; Miss Bell still rigid in her chair; and the quite-dead body of Wolf on the carpet.

"I am afraid," said Miss Bell, "that the telephone is out of order. If you wish to summon assistance, you will find another one in the hall."

Later, when he had got things sorted out a bit, Petrella had a final word with Miss Bell.

"In a way," he said, "it's your fault. This sort of thing is bound to happen if you keep a lot of money lying about. I really should be happier if you would put it in a bank."

"Certainly not," said Miss Bell. She was scratching the head of Simba, once more restored to her place by the fire. "I cannot pretend that I enjoyed it all but, viewed in a proper light, one can feel oneself to be spiritually enriched by such an experience. I hope that nothing terrible will happen to Mr. Jackson."

"I shouldn't imagine so. He could reasonably plead self-defence. Or at least the provocation will reduce it to man-slaughter. He might have to explain how he was carrying a gun without a licence."

"It was merciful that he was," said Miss Bell. "And I am most obliged to him. Most."

Petrella later passed this message on to Mr. Jackson, who said, "It's a funny thing, no one ever finding that wallet. If Wolf picked it up, why wasn't it on him? Perhaps the police—?"

"Certainly not," said Petrella. "Anything found would have been reported."

"You don't think the old lady—?"

"She did tell me that she had been enriched as a result of her experience."

"She said that?"

"Spiritually enriched."

"I see," said Mr. Jackson thoughtfully.

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OCCUPATIONAL HAZARD?

Killing time is not so much murder as suicide.

NO FLIES ON FRIDAY

" What a woman," he said with wonderment
" What a woman ! "

BY KEM BENNETT

WITH a glass of whisky-and-soda in his hand, and a fine outward display of casualness, Edward faced Max Bosman. Inwardly he was not so serene; he found millionaires awe-inspiring. Furthermore it was a strange, if not eerie, feeling to be drinking whisky with one's double.

Max Bosman was a thickset man with large, square hands and shrewd, cool eyes. Aggressively male, his clothes were expensive, his hair well-barbered, and his blue cheeks closely shaven. He smelt strongly of one of the more virile kinds of toilet water.

His manner was both good-humoured and dominating. He looked, Edward noted, as if he could talk you into doing what he wanted, or laugh you into it or, if necessary, club you into it—and did not mind very much which, so long as the job got done. Edward's observation was not far off the mark.

Max Bosman sat down in a soft modern chair, flashing a pair of splendid socks as he hitched up his trousers. " This," he said, " is the set-up."

He had a quiet, throaty voice that now and again acquired a touch of the hacksaw blade. " There's a big deal coming off. Cars. I mean to bust into the European car business and I'm in the market for a plant and sales organization complete. There's one here in England'd suit me fine. Trouble is the people selling know I'm interested and they have the price jacked up . . ."

" But I thought," Edward interrupted, " that you were the airline king."

" I have a couple of airlines, sure, but they run themselves . . . Now look, Mr. Ferrowes, this is the point. I've been over here nearly three weeks now. So far I've been holding fire on the deal and the boys are getting nervous. Any moment now they're going to be nervous enough to settle for a reasonable offer; all they want is one last kick in the pants. I've figured out a way of giving it to them."

"Involving me?" Edward queried.

"Sure," Max Bosman said. "I want you to go to Paris, Mr. Ferrowes, in my clothes, with my wife, driving the new car that my development plant in the States has just turned out. I want you and the car photographed when you leave and I want the story in the newspapers. That end of it can be fixed.

"The thing is, are you prepared to impersonate me for a day or two? For a fee, naturally. I don't know what you'd have in mind, but I was thinking of five hundred pounds."

Mr. Bosman paused—not without a confident expectancy, for he was a man who usually got what he wanted.

Edward frowned. His mouth was dry and the thought of five hundred pounds for more or less nothing was making his head swim but, all the same, he was determined not to jump at the bait as some actors might have done. "Hm," he said severely. "It's really not my cup of tea at all, I'm afraid, Mr. Bosman. I'm a fairly well-known West End actor and a scandal of any kind . . . You know what I mean. I should have to know a lot more—"

"O.K.," Bosman cut in. "So I'll tell you some more. There's a plant for sale in France, too. I wouldn't touch it—it's old-fashioned and I don't like the political situation—but these guys over here don't know that. The very fact that I went to Paris at all would probably scare 'em into dropping their price by half a million. Get it? Now, there's no risk to your reputation, Mr. Ferrowes. Nobody's going to ask you any questions. I'm not even going to ask you to inspect the French plant. All you have to do is go, stick around a couple of days, and come back. You'll have my wife to take care of you—her name's Friday, and she's a tough egg. How about it?"

"Why don't *you* go to Paris?" Edward asked. "Why send me?"

Max Bosman smiled. "I've got a nice little information set-up here in London," he said. "When the news breaks that I've gone to Paris—or that you have—I want to be here to see the reaction. During the two days that you're over there, Mr. Ferrowes, there'll come a moment when the guys who are selling this plant will be at their jumpiest. That's when I slip in a quick offer. If I were in Paris it'd mean telephones and lawyers and middlemen, and ten to one the thing wouldn't be timed right. Got it?"

Edward nodded. He was fascinated. Bosman's smile had a chilling effect upon the marrow of the bones. He shivered, feeling sorry for the Englishmen, whoever they were.

"Five hundred pounds," Bosman was saying. "Two days in Paris, all expenses paid. No risk, no trouble, just a nice

holiday. Maybe a bonus, even, if things work out. Think, Mr. Ferrowes."

"I am thinking," Edward admitted. His eyes were closed.

"Have another drink," said Max Bosman.

Edward held out his glass. "All right," he said a moment later. "I'll do it."

Mr. Bosman did not seem surprised. He nodded. "Now," he said, "details." He took an envelope from his inside pocket. "You'll find tickets in there, Mr. Ferrowes, as well as some French money for expenses. You'll also find a cheque for a hundred pounds—you get the other four after you're back. Are you listening?"

Edward hastily opened his eyes. "Yes."

"The car's booked on the eleven o'clock plane from Lympne tomorrow. The press'll be warned. I want you to beat it now and get anything you may need in the way of make-up. When you come back I shall be gone. You sleep here tonight and tomorrow morning the car'll be brought round at eight. My wife'll join you at half-past eight; she's been staying with friends in the country. You'll find clothes in the wardrobes; help yourself. I guess that's about all. Any questions, Mr. Ferrowes?"

"I can't think of any."

Bosman chuckled happily. "O.K.," he said. "I'll be seeing you."

Edward rose to his feet. He picked up his bowler hat and umbrella—he was one of the better-dressed actors—and took the millionaire's extended hand.

"Just one thing," Bosman said, squeezing Edward's hand relentlessly. "I've let you into a pile of secrets, Mr. Ferrowes. You *could* sell 'em to the opposition, I guess. I know you won't, though, will you?"

Edward shook his head. He shook it so hard that he could feel his jowls slapping against his teeth. The idea of double-crossing Max Bosman frightened him. In fact, Max Bosman frightened him. He expected that Mrs. Bosman would frighten him too. But then, five hundred pounds was five hundred pounds.

"Of course not, Mr. Bosman," he said. "Good-bye." He left the suite, wondering whether his conscience would permit him not to declare the five hundred pounds to the Inland Revenue, and thinking that it might . . .

That night Edward slept dreamlessly in Max Bosman's bed at the Cosmopolitan Hotel. He was called at seven o'clock and he stayed in bed with his face buried in the pillows until the maid

had drawn the curtains and gone away. Then he got up. He put on underclothes and some padding that he had bought from a theatrical costumier's the night before. He chose one of Max Bosman's monogrammed shirts and a pair of beautifully-made trousers which he fastened round his unwontedly bulky middle with a gold-buckled, snakeskin belt.

Sitting in front of the dressing-table mirror, he widened his nostrils with a pair of little plastic springs; he fastened to his upper lip a narrow band of black moustache which imitated Bosman's facial decoration to perfection; he fixed two gauze-mounted pieces of greying false hair to his scalp at the temples and brushed the false hair into his own so that it blended perfectly.

Max Bosman stared at him from the mirror. Only the eyes were a give-away. Edward reached, as it were, into his innermost recesses and fished out what ruthlessness he could find. This, garnished with a touch of sardonic humour, he then tried to project into his expression. He succeeded, up to a point. It was enough.

He would pass, he decided. It was not, after all, a matter of life and death; nor would the unfortunate British industrialists who were trying to put the squeeze on Max Bosman be likely to have trained observers posted on the road to Paris. They would just read their papers and believe what they read, like the rest of the mugs.

Feeling ready to put his disguise to the test, Edward rang for breakfast. It came quickly; the millionaire's suite at the Cosmopolitan commanded service. "Good morning, Mr. Bosman, sir," the waiter said.

Edward gave him a masterful smile. "Good morning. Put it over there, will you. Thanks." The waiter left.

Edward straightened his shoulders and glanced with gratification in the big wall mirror. It had worked. The waiter had fallen for it. Evidently, even the voice had been convincing. What a pity, Edward thought, that he was short of an audience. He sat down to his breakfast.

At eight o'clock the hall porter rang to say that Mr. Bosman's car had arrived. Edward thanked him, put down the telephone, and crossed to a window looking out over the hotel forecourt. He had little difficulty in spotting the Bosman prototype; it stood out among its flanking Rolls-Royces like a courtesan at a vicarage tea party.

At twenty minutes to nine Friday Bosman arrived.

She came in, shut the door carefully behind her, and turned, leaning back against the door to take a long, appraising look

at Edward, who was sitting in an armchair with the newspapers, treating himself to an extra cup of millionaire's coffee.

Edward dropped the papers, very nearly dropped the coffee, and rose hastily to his feet. For no good reason he could think of, he had been expecting someone blonde, plump, rather too well-dressed, and case-hardened with riches.

Friday Bosman was dark, suntanned, slim almost to the point of being thin. She smiled. "Well!" she said in a light, pleasant American voice. "I know you're not Max because you've eaten a large breakfast."

Edward said huskily, "Mrs. Bosman?" He had to make sure; this girl could have been a friend—so to speak.

She nodded. She put down her bag, walked to the window, and stood looking out of it with her legs straddled and her hands on her hips. She must have been thirty. A warm feeling of delighted surprise spread through Edward.

Presently she swung round and looked at him again, candidly, her eyes friendly and amused. "You make me feel very peculiar," she said. "Don't worry, I shall get used to it. May I have a cup of coffee?"

He hastened to pour one for her. She took it. "Thank you, Mr. Ferrowes. I was with Max when he saw you in that terrible film. I noticed the resemblance, too, but I wasn't prepared for this. Please accept my congratulations."

"I hardly deserve them," Edward murmured with winning English diffidence. "The resemblance is there; all I had to do was to add the highlights, so to speak."

"'Highlights' is the word!" She drank some coffee, still staring at him with fascination. "The voice is not so good, though. In fact the voice is downright bad, Mr. Ferrowes."

It seemed very important to Edward that Friday Bosman should think well of him. "Hell, I wasn't trying," he said, bullying his vocal chords with Max Bosman's deeper, thicker, less actorish noises. "I don't reckon to say more than a couple of words to the press boys, anyhow."

Friday started to laugh. Her laughter took her by the throat and shook her until she had to sit down. Edward smiled. It was applause, this laughter; he felt sure of it. He was right.

Friday wiped her eyes with a sensible handkerchief. "I think you're great, Mr. Ferrowes," she said. "Now we'd better be going if we're to reach Lympne by eleven."

It was nine o'clock when they drove away from the Cosmopolitan in the fabulous Bosman prototype. It was a great cruiser of a motor car, glittering with chromium plate. It had buttons for everything. It had American dimensions and Italian styling.

It made jaws drop and eyebrows rise all the way out of London. Edward felt pleased with himself as he drove it.

At half past ten they arrived at Lympne Airport and, sitting in the Bosman prototype, were photographed several dozen times. At eleven they took off in a car-carrying Bristol freighter, at twenty past they landed at Le Touquet, and by half past they were on the road to Paris.

The Bosman car swallowed kilometres like a thirsty schoolboy drinking lemonade through a straw. They stopped for lunch at Beauvais. By the time lunch was over Edward knew a little more about Friday and Friday knew a great deal more about Edward.

Friday, Edward learnt, was the love-daughter of a Texan cattleman and a beauty queen. She was thirty-two, and as a result of the generosity of her father, whom she had never met, she had always been rich. She had been married twice, was a graduate in social psychology at the University of California, and had met Max Bosman while modelling swim-suits for the hell of it in Las Vegas. She was also a minor swimming champion and had made two films for Metropolitan, shot almost entirely under water.

She was also a good listener. From Le Touquet to Beauvais, Edward covered his early career, including the six years he had spent in the army during Hitler's war; from Beauvais to the outskirts of Paris he filled in gaps, brought her up to date, and confided to her his dreams and aspirations.

Edward was a name, Friday learnt, but not a star. She also learnt that being a name was not all roses because it made an actor too expensive for supporting roles and insufficiently box-office for the star parts, hence his acceptance of Max Bosman's five hundred pounds. All he had in view otherwise, he confessed, was a television play in six weeks' time, and the rent was overdue.

They arrived at the outskirts of Paris, firm friends, in mid afternoon. After they had crossed the Pont de Neuilly, Friday said, "Stop at the next café, Edward. I want to ring the hotel. Max wants photographs of our arrival, and I'd better make sure the press is there." Edward did as he was told.

When Friday returned to the car she seemed thoughtful. He asked her if everything was all right. She nodded absently.

A few hundred yards farther on Edward was forced by some psychic premonition of trouble to ask Friday if she was sure everything was all right. She looked at him. "It is now," she said enigmatically. "Look, when we get to the hotel, don't say a word, just do as I say. O.K.?"

Edward agreed. He did not, however, feel entirely at ease.

The arrival of the Bosman car at the Hôtel du Monde in the

Avenue Matignon was an event. Edward thumbed the button of the parking brake, an honour guard of flunkeys swarmed out through revolving doors, press cameras flashed. Edward and Friday progressed royally up the hotel steps.

Inside, they were greeted by the head porter. Friday smiled. "Bonjour, Philémon," she said. She had been in Paris as a student and she spoke good French.

Philémon bowed, answered, "Bonjour, madame," and, in mid bow, extended an arm in the direction of the lifts. He also winked, very skilfully and secretly.

Edward frowned.

In the lift, tensing his belly muscles for an upward sensation, Edward was taken by surprise when the lift went down.

"What . . ." he started. Friday put her finger to her lips.

The lift doors opened. The corridor beyond was bare and there was a smell of rich cooking in the air. "Where on earth . . ." Edward started.

Friday said, "Sh!" Edward shushed.

Led by Philémon, they passed along a maze of corridors, past kitchens, butteries, store rooms, and sculleries. Eventually they came to a service door giving on to a narrow side street. There was a grey-painted Peugeot parked at the kerb.

Philémon opened the Peugeot's doors and thrust in the suitcases. Friday got into the driver's seat. Philémon urged Edward into the seat beside her, slammed the door, pocketed a wad of thousand-franc notes that Friday held out, saluted, smiled, and bowed. The engine caught and Friday steered the Peugeot gently away from the kerb.

For a few minutes Edward was silent. Then he said, "Now look, what's all this about? I thought . . ."

"There's been a change of plan," Friday said. "I changed it."

Edward was worried. They were driving through the Bois de Boulogne and the sun was shining. Furthermore, the birds were singing. But he was still worried. He was remembering his strong impression that Max Bosman was not a man to cross.

"Friday," he said severely, having been invited to call her by her Christian name, "we're out of the traffic now, so will you kindly explain?"

She turned and looked at him. She was calm and business-like.

"I told you I was Mrs. Max number five?" He nodded.

"Well," she said, "Max likes to change. He loves me—most of the time—but marriages are like cars to him and he's a terrible sucker for a new model. He's found one since he's been in London."

"You mean a girl-friend?" Edward queried.

"What else?" The brown eyes looking through the wind-screen had hardened somewhat. "She's called the Honourable Emily Lantham. She's a long drink of Vichy water with no chest and an astral tiara that she wears all the time. She's the daughter of a viscount. Max likes that. The first girl he married was a waitress and he's been working his way up the social-scale ever since . . ."

"Friday," Edward said, "please . . . I'm sorry to hear of this, but quite honestly it's no reason for me to go against your husband's instructions. I . . ."

Friday cocked an eyebrow at him. "It is if you want to stay out of the divorce court," she said quietly. "Max's detectives were thicker round the Hôtel du Monde than the crowd round that vulgar car of his."

There was a silence. Presently Edward said, "Good lord!" More silence. Then he added, "But—but the deal—you know, the car factory . . . I mean, what an incredibly complicated—"

"Oh, don't worry," Friday cut in. "I don't doubt Max is buying a car factory. I don't doubt it was useful to him to send you to Paris. My husband, I may tell you, likes few things better than killing two birds with one projectile. The fact remains that he sent me with you in order to get evidence for a divorce."

"But I was supposed to be *him*!" Edward protested in a rather high-pitched voice.

"What difference does that make?" Friday asked. "You aren't. We were going to spend two nights together in the same suite. You don't think he would have admitted in court to sending you to Paris, do you?"

"I suppose not." Edward's voice was glum. "Oh damn!" he said with sudden bitterness. "What are we to do?"

"We're going to a hide-out. It's a small hotel I know on the river near Mantes. It's called Le Petit Robinson of all things, but it's cute, and the food's good, and we can swim."

Edward lit a cigarette. He was starting to burn. On principle, he disliked being angry; not only was it a futile sort of emotion, but also it was bad for actors, making them age prematurely. Now, however, a feeling of strong justification had fanned a spark into flame and he was, without doubt, starting to burn.

"Why," he said to Friday, "if you knew all about this—this Machiavellian plot, did you agree to come with me to Paris at all?" His voice was cool.

"I didn't know, stupid," Friday answered. "Not until I called the hotel, that is. Then Philémon put me wise. He's an old friend."

Edward grunted, coldly ignoring her use of the word " stupid." " Why," he went on, " are we now going to this hide-out of yours? Why not straight back to England? "

There was a short silence, followed by a grim little chuckle. " Well? " Edward said, still burning too fiercely to see any humour in the situation.

" I have my own plans," Friday said. " If Max's car deal depends on our staying out of England for two days, that's all right by me. I don't want him to be able to hold it against me that I spoilt things."

" I see," Edward said. " And me . . . what about me? Am I to be considered? "

" Up to a point," Friday said. She was smiling.

" I rather think I want to go home," Edward said stiffly. " Before I took the job I told your husband that I couldn't afford any scandal."

" Don't worry about the scandal, honey," Friday said. " Thanks to Philémon we've ducked that. There's always the balance of your money, though. If you go home now I doubt if you'll be paid."

"" I doubt if I shall be paid anyway," Edward observed bitterly. " I doubt if I shall even ask to be paid."

" Don't be a mug," Friday said. " You'll be paid. If Max won't pay, I will. What about it, Edward? For my sake, not for Max's, will you stick around? "

Edward looked at her. She was irresistible. He stopped burning and suddenly felt happy and excited again. Any man who turned down two days in a hide-out with Friday Bosman would be lunatic, he decided. " All right," he said, " I'll stay. For your sake, Friday, only for your sake."

He patted her on the knee. She didn't seem to mind. They drove on in a silence which became more and more companionable and, at six, just in time for a bath and a drink before dinner, they arrived at Le Petit Robinson.

The Little Robinson was half hotel and half riverside dance hall. It was a nondescript building with wild, wandering gardens that reached down to the bank of the River Seine. At the week-ends, when the river cruisers and excursion boats provided a source of customers, it was merry and crowded; in mid week it slumbered, keeping itself to itself and running, as it were, at half speed ahead.

It suited Friday's purpose admirably. They were given two comfortable rooms by Madame Felix, the proprietress, who remembered Friday from her student days, and were fed

bountifully three times a day. They spent the two days fishing, swimming, and touring the countryside in the Peugeot.

Edward did not even bother to wear his disguise, causing Madame Felix to remark to the cook that Monsieur the Englishman appeared to suffer from a wasting disease and obviously needed feeding up. She also congratulated Edward on shaving off his moustache, which made Friday first gurgle with laughter, then glance sideways at Edward and frown thoughtfully.

On their second evening, after dinner, they sat drinking brandy under the willow trees at the bottom of the garden. The air was soft and perfumed. Friday was dressed in a flared, black embroidered skirt with a lemon-yellow top in a soft wool. She was brown and clean and happy, relaxed and unworried, and not to make love to her in the moonlight suddenly seemed to Edward to be grossly illogical.

"Friday," he said. She turned and smiled at him. "You're very beautiful," Edward went on. "I shall not forget these two days in a hurry."

"Neither shall I, Edward," Friday admitted.

He moved a little closer, encircling her bare shoulders with his right arm. He said, "Look at the moon," and, when she raised her head to obey, he kissed her behind the ear. Her scent filled his nostrils and he felt dizzy. "Friday," he whispered, his heart beating hard.

"No, Edward," Friday said.

"Oh."

"Not," Friday added, "that I'm not delighted to be asked. If you hadn't I should have wondered if I was slipping."

Edward was silent. He kept his arm round Friday's shoulders. After a while he said thoughtfully, "I wonder what Max is doing now."

Friday gently disengaged herself from his encircling arm and drank some brandy. "Making a pass at the Honourable Emily Lantham," she said, "without doubt."

"The man must be mad," Edward commented.

Friday looked at him. She smiled. Her tranquillity was unassailable. "Not mad," she said, "just inquisitive. Poor Max is always convinced that the view round the corner will be better than the one he's looking at now."

"Don't you mind?"

"I mind—but not nearly enough to leave Max to Emily Lantham."

"You're a remarkable woman."

"Thank you, Edward."

Silence. A night-travelling barge chugged past on the river,

reflecting its yellow oil lights in the undulant surface of the green water. The nightingales were singing.

"Friday," Edward said. "Friday, darling." He went on his knees and looked beseechingly into her brown eyes. She patted him gently, making him feel somewhat like a dog.

"No, Edward," she said. "No dice." He got to his feet.

"Have you no sense of poetic justice?" he demanded angrily.

She shook her head. "I don't believe I have."

Edward gave it up.

They drove to Le Touquet the following morning, caught the first plane after lunch, and were back in England at half past two. While Edward was seeing their bags through the customs, Friday went to hire a car to replace the Peugeot they had left in France, and to make a telephone call.

She spent quite a long time in the telephone kiosk, and when she came out Edward was at the airport bar drinking a whisky and reading an English newspaper. He pointed out headlines to her; they were at the top of the financial page and appeared to worry Edward considerably. MAX BOSMAN PAYS HIGH PRICE FOR CONTROLLING INTEREST IN CALYX MOTORS, they said.

"I bet he did," Friday commented. Edward asked her why, but she wouldn't say.

They arrived in London at half past four and drove straight to the flat where Max Bosman had been in hiding. It was a penthouse on top of one of the larger blocks in Park Lane, and the nearer Edward got to it, the more restive he felt. His reasons were twofold; one, he had disobeyed Max Bosman by not staying in Paris; two, although he could not imagine why, it appeared from the newspaper headlines that the plan had misfired and that Bosman, the international tiger, had been savaged by the English bulldogs.

As he stopped the car outside the block, he said to Friday, "I don't really see why I need come up. You'll want to—er—talk."

"Don't you want your four hundred pounds?" Friday queried.

"Ye-es," Edward said. "But then I could come back tomorrow . . . Or you might be kind enough to ask Max to post me a cheque."

Friday shook her head. "No time like the present, honey," she said. "Besides, I might need you as a witness."

"Oh," Edward said, "all right." He got out of the car. The nape of his neck was tingling.

"Ah!" Max Bosman said. "So you're back."

Friday seemed unmoved by his tone and by the hot look in his dark eyes. Edward was not. Friday said coolly, "Yes, Max,

we're back." She crossed to the desk, took a cigarette from a box, and lit it before lowering herself into an armchair.

"Where've you been?" Bosman snarled. He was talking to Edward. "I thought I told you to stay in Paris . . ."

Edward kept silence, doing his best to make it icy.

Friday said quietly, "Don't be so violent, Max."

Bosman glared at her. "I reckon I've got a right to be violent," he shouted. He turned again on Edward, who flinched. "In fact it doesn't matter where you've been. What does matter is that you sold me out. Actors! Show me an actor that isn't greedy and stupid. Now, look here . . ."

"Max!" Friday's voice was imperative. "Shut up and sit down." In full flow of invective Max Bosman's voice died away. He turned, his eyes narrowed.

"Now what is this?" he said grimly. "Just what is this?"

"How was Emily?" Friday asked.

Max Bosman hesitated, then shrugged. The hesitation was almost imperceptible. "You mean Emily Lantham? How the heck should I know?"

"I thought you might have seen her," Friday said.

Bosman said, "I was hiding out—I haven't seen anybody."

"Oh." Friday's voice had changed. Now it was gentle and a little sad. "We had to leave the hotel in Paris, Max," she said. "Don't blame Edward. I was the one who suggested going."

"So you were, were you? Why?"

Back came the steely quality that had stopped Max Bosman in his tracks. "Because the joint was lousy with detectives," Friday snapped. "Your detectives, Max Bosman. You didn't even have the sense to employ a new outfit."

Bosman shook his head irritably. "Hold it, honey," he said. "There's some misunderstanding. Just let me deal with this goddam actor and then we'll talk . . ."

"No," Friday said. "I prefer to talk now. You're lying, Max. You did see Emily Lantham, not once but several times. She came to dinner here the day before yesterday and stayed most of the night. Yesterday she arrived for lunch and stayed on."

"Did you put an eye on me?" Max Bosman said in a thick voice. "Did you? By heck, if you did I'll . . ."

"Not on you, honey," Friday said. "I wouldn't do a thing like that. No, I put one on Emily Lantham."

Edward cleared his throat. It was an inoffensive noise but it sounded quite loud in the silence that was prevailing. He smiled. "I'd better be off," he said cheerily. "All this is none of my business. If you'd like to send me a cheque, Mr. Bosman."

"Cheque!" Max Bosman went slowly purple. "After the

money you've cost me, you want a cheque. You'd better—"

Friday said, "Shut up, Max. Lay off him, will you?" To Edward, she added, "Don't go. This won't take long. Sit down. Don't take any notice of Max; he's just barking."

She turned Bosman's fury back on herself again. "Barking!" he yelled. "So now I'm a dog, am I?"

"Do you want to marry Emily?" Friday asked.

Fire glittered in Bosman's dark eyes. "Could be, honey," he said through clenched teeth. "Could be."

"Well," Friday said, lighting a second cigarette from the stub of her old one, "for a better woman I might let you go—if I felt sure you meant it and weren't in love with me any longer. But not for the Honourable Emily, honey. I'd never forgive myself."

"Emily Lantham is a charming, cultured English aristocrat," Max Bosman said, breathing heavily. "You—you're a . . ."

"At ten yesterday morning," Friday interrupted gently, smiling like an angel, "a certain charming, cultured English aristocrat was seen to enter the offices of Calyx Motors. When she came out her handbag was noticeably thicker than when she went in."

Behind Max Bosman's back Edward was clapping—but soundlessly—and mouthing words of encouragement at Friday. She grinned at him. Bosman sat down very quietly.

There was a long silence. Then Max Bosman rose to his feet again. He crossed to Friday's chair and, taking her hands, pulled her to her feet. "What a woman," he said with wonderment. "What a woman!" He kissed her. "I love you, Friday," he said. "I don't know what I should do without you."

"I love you, too, Max," Friday said.

Max Bosman turned to Edward. "Isn't she wonderful?"

"Splendid," Edward said. "You're a very lucky man."

"I guess I am." Max Bosman crossed to a desk. He took a cheque-book from a drawer. A few seconds later he handed a cheque to Edward, who took it, folded it, and put it in his pocket.

"Good-bye, Edward," Friday said, and kissed him.

Outside the door Edward looked at the cheque. It was for five hundred pounds, not four. A tingle passed down his spine. He shuddered. What a woman!

He shut his eyes for a moment, thinking of Le Petit Robinson, the Seine, the moonlight, and Friday. Then, with a sigh, he walked into the lift, knowing that he wouldn't get a part like that again, not in a hundred years.

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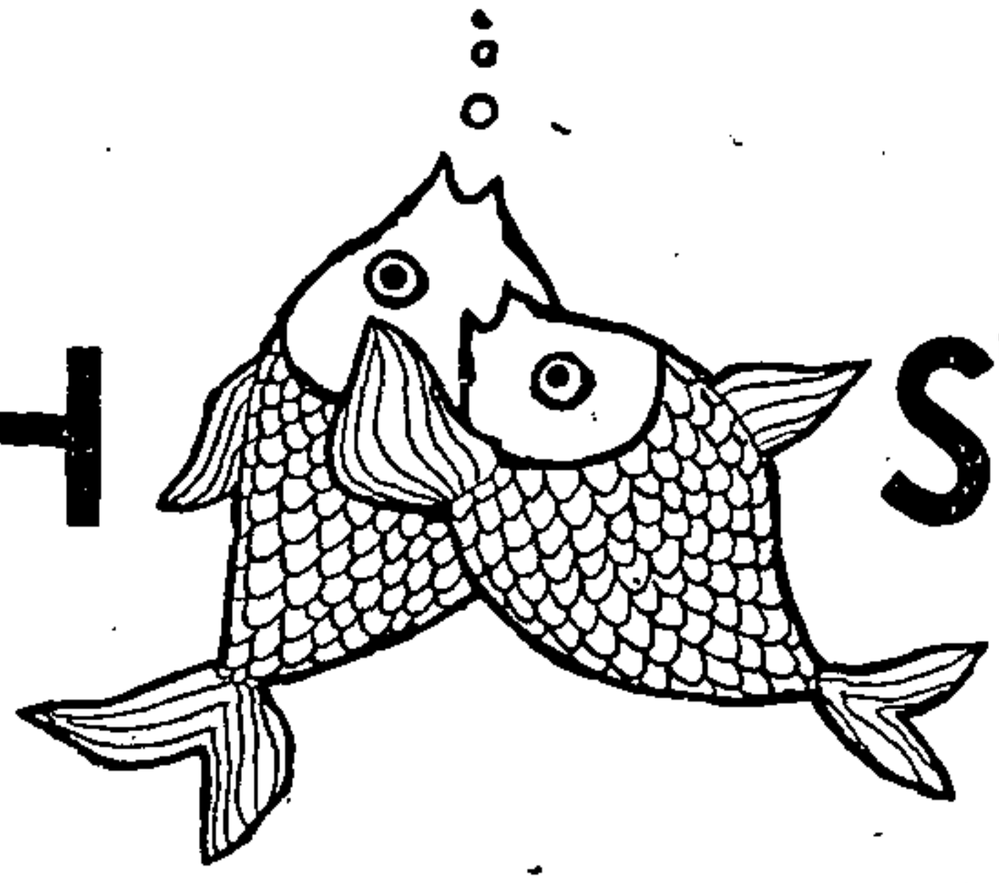
★ ★ ★

A cynic is a man who looks both ways before crossing a one-way street.

FISH STORY



A rescue helicopter from the R.A.F. station at Valley, Anglesey, went out on Saturday after a man had been reported stuck in the mud off the Valley pier. The winchman was lowered towards the man as the helicopter hovered, with its engine noise echoing through the valley. The man in the mud looked up and said: "Go away, man. Can't you see I'm fishing, man? You're disturbing the fish, man." The helicopter left.

From The Times, July 8, 1957

The Minister of Agriculture and Fisheries recently announced that it is illegal to fish for goldfish in a goldfish bowl.

You may hunt the wild rhinoceros and kill it with a gun;
You may harpoon whales by dozens and feel easy
when it's done;
But there's one thing that's forbidden and may get you
in a hole:
You mustn't fish for goldfish in a goldfish bowl.

Tickle trout if you feel like it, and no one will say you nay
(That is, of course, provided your fish licence is O.K.);
You may pot the thieving rook whenas you take a
country stroll;
But you mustn't fish for goldfish in a goldfish bowl.

For carassius suratus (*the goldfish's Latin name*)
You may angle in the open nor incur the slightest blame;
But there's one place where it's safe from you on peril
of your soul:
You mustn't fish for goldfish in a goldfish bowl.

ALLAN M. LAING, *Spoilsport*

ALL IN A FLASH

A lot of lightning
was looking for a quick way home

BY E. L. MALPASS

THIS story opens as dramatic as you could wish.

It is the first night of Zion Chapel's production of *Faust*, the thunder is rolling and banging about the sky, and the lightning is dropping from the low clouds almost as thick as the raindrops. On the stage Evans the Groceries is singing at the top of his voice, fighting a losing battle with the thunder. In the wings Dai Griffiths, in his Mephistopheles outfit, leans against a metal ladder, waiting for his cue.

It is one of those nights of storm and tempest when the great world itself seems no more than a little boat plunging and tossing through a raging sea; one of those nights when the doors of civilization are flung open, and anything may come in.

Robert Roberts, the producer, looked uneasily at Mephistopheles through his rimless glasses. "Better come away from that steel ladder, Dai boy," he said nervously. "A lot of lightning looking for a quick way home tonight, for sure."

But before Dai could even open his mouth to speak, the ladder flashed with a blinding light. Dai Griffiths cried out, and fell to the floor.

Upset proper, Robert Roberts was. Dai was due on stage in less than three minutes. He fell to his knees beside Griffiths. "Dai," he called. "Speak to me."

But Dai lay still. Robert felt his pulse. No movement. It was like looking at your watch and finding the second hand still and unmoving.

"Speak to me, Dai," pleaded Robert. But Dai did not speak. Dai did not move.

Dai was dead, see.

Well, there is dramatic for you. But that is not all, not by a long way. Robert Roberts crouched on the floor, wringing his hands. It was a terrible moment. No understudies in the Zion Chapel Operatic Society, you will understand. Took them all their time to find enough singers to go round, it did. And even if there had been an understudy, it would not have been possible

to get him into the late Dai Griffiths's Mephistopheles outfit and on the stage before Faust finished his aria.

Robert Roberts wrung his hands. And as the thunderbolts rolled like cannon balls about the sky he came to his dreadful decision. The show could not go on. He would have to bring down the curtain. It was the bitterest decision he had ever made.

Yet, even as he began to straighten his back, he was aware of a flicker of movement. He turned his head. There, not three feet away, he saw a pair of pointed, red shoes. His astonished eyes travelled upwards. He saw a pair of red-stockinged legs. He saw a barbed tail.

For a moment he thought Dai Griffiths must have returned from the dead. But no. There was Dai still crumpled on the floor. Slowly Robert Roberts straightened up. He stared at the scarlet cloak, the sardonic face with its black, pointed beard, and two small horns. So miracles *did* still happen.

Someone had turned up to take Dai's place, someone already dressed for the part. It was incredible. But too overwrought Robert was to worry about that.

" Can you sing? " he asked, and in his anxiety his voice was a mere croak.

" Mi-mi-mi-mi," sang the newcomer on an ascending scale. It answered Robert's question. The voice was powerful, resonant, and attractive.

There was only one thing to do. Send him on stage. But Robert was conscientious to a fault. Never would he take an unnecessary risk. " Do—do you know the part? " he asked.

" From A to Z," replied the stranger, erect, arms folded, arrogant.

" And—forgive my asking—but you can act? "

The stranger's lip curled. " I don't need to act *this* part," he said coldly, and stepped on to the stage just in time for his cue.

Robert Roberts listened anxiously. Then he heard the stranger's voice, loud and clear. The opera went smoothly on its way. Robert heaved a great sigh of relief. By damn, now, but that had been an awkward five minutes. And things had turned out better than anyone could have expected. In fact, Robert decided, if he had to choose between this new chap and Dai Griffiths, he would choose the new chap every time. What singing! What bravura! By the sound of him he was the finest bass they had heard in Dinas for many a long day.

Vaguely Robert Roberts wondered who he was. But he was not of an inquiring turn of mind. Enough for him that the new chap had turned up and saved the day.

He gave his mind to the disposal of Dai Griffiths, and it was

then that he noticed the smell of brimstone. Well, there is funny, he thought, lightning smelling of brimstone. It was a hot, dry smell that made him feel quite thirsty. In fact, if there was one thing he really wanted after the strain of those last few minutes it was a cup of tea.

"Brought you a cup of tea, Mr. Roberts," said a shy, soft voice behind him. Robert spun round. Myfanwy Jenkins stood there, her dark, liquid eyes turned shyly on the floor.

Robert took the cup. Myfanwy lifted her eyes and gazed at him adoringly for a moment. Then she lowered her eyes again. "Is there anything else I can get you, Mr. Roberts?" she asked humbly.

"No, thank you, Myfanwy. Soon time for you to be on stage again." Myfanwy coloured. Was this a rebuke from her hero?

"I—I'm quite ready, Mr. Roberts," she said. She scurried away, yet daring for one moment to raise her eyes to her idol's thin, serious face.

Robert Roberts finished his tea. He soon forgot about poor Myfanwy. A pretty little creature, of course. But she would never get beyond the chorus. Sweet and pure though her voice was, you couldn't hear her ten yards away. And when Robert Roberts became interested in a girl it was going to be in someone who could take the lead. Someone who, like Robert, intended to go places.

The opera went on. Oh, what a performance that was! Not only was the newcomer magnificent in himself, he carried the rest of the cast along with him. Before that wild and stormy evening was over the audience had been brought to their feet a dozen times, the reporter from the *Dinas Advertiser* had run out of adjectives, and Robert Roberts, in a happy trance, was accepting engagements for Covent Garden, La Scala, and Glyndebourne.

As soon as the performance ended, Robert tried to buttonhole the new chap. He wanted to make sure of him for the rest of the week. He also wanted to touch upon the subject of *Elijah* at Christmas. But there was no sign of the stranger. He wasn't there, and no one had seen him go. Puzzling, it was. Worrying, too, putting on *Faust* when one Mephistopheles was dead and the other vanished into thin air.

When Robert Roberts went home his mind was in turmoil, drunk with the music, battered by the thunder, elated, anxious, triumphant, and very, very tired. No wonder he could not sleep. The storm had gone away now, and from his window he could see the lightning skipping about the distant mountain tops, and the thunder still muttered and growled in the caves of the sky. A clock struck, dropping twelve rounded notes into the

rumbling dark, and at the same time there was a loud knocking on Robert Roberts's bedroom door.

Robert sat up in bed. He switched on the light. Nervous he was, and who wouldn't be at that hour of the night? Slowly the door handle turned. Slowly the door opened. And who should walk into the room but the stranger, still dressed like Mephistopheles.

An unusual hour it was to come visiting, but Robert was delighted. "You all right for the rest of the week?" he asked quickly.

The stranger bowed. "I shall be there," he said. "Provided, of course, I have the promise of my customary fee."

Robert froze. "Fee?" He sounded haughty. "This is an amateur society, Mr.—er. No need to talk about fees, is there, now?"

"Oh, I never take cash," said the stranger airily. "I take something much more interesting."

Robert relaxed again. He settled himself more comfortably in his bed. You could always rely on two men of the world to find an answer to this question of amateur status, he reflected smugly. He gave the stranger a knowing look. "Presentation clock, for instance, maybe?" he suggested.

"In the opera we have just been playing," sneered the stranger, "Mephistopheles did not ask Faust for a presentation clock for services rendered. He demanded his soul."

Well, there was an uncomfortable thing to say to anyone in the middle of the night. Made Robert Roberts feel quite uneasy, him not having much sense of humour and always finding it difficult to know whether people were joking or not. He laughed, rather nervously. "Not suggesting anything like that, are you, Mr.—er?" he said. He laughed again.

To his surprise he saw the stranger was no longer there. He shrugged, and put out the light. The storm rolled a little nearer. Must have got that brimstone smell in my nostrils, thought Robert. Even smell it in the bedroom now.

The next day the whole of Dinas was talking about the opera. Never had there been such singing.

But the Reverend Micah Meredith struck a more sombre note. "Pity about Dai Griffiths," he said to Robert.

"Yes, indeed," agreed Robert. He cheered up. "But this new chap has a finer voice. Better actor, too."

"Wherever did you find him, then?" asked the Reverend Micah. He leaned confidentially towards Robert. "A Chapel man, I hope?"

"Sings in the choir, regular as clockwork, down Swansea way," replied Robert, who knew the minister's little prejudices.

So the minister went away happy, and that night they had to have chairs in the aisles, and by the time Saturday night came there were coach parties in from as far as Llandudno. A triumph it was, that last performance, with the stranger sweeping all before him.

Quite a party there was after the performance. The only person missing was the stranger. Disappointing that, with everyone wanting to meet him and congratulate him. But nice, too, in a way, for Robert Roberts; for when people found they couldn't congratulate the stranger, they made the best of things by congratulating Robert instead.

Yes, a fine party, with everyone gathered round Robert, and Robert's rimless glasses flashing with pride and self-satisfaction. And always, at the very back of the crowd, poor little Myfanwy, waiting, waiting, waiting.

At last her turn came. The last tomato cocktail was drunk. People drifted away.

Robert, who tonight had sucked people dry of praise as though they were so many oranges, looked down at the dark head of Myfanwy, impatiently waiting for her to congratulate him.

Myfanwy looked up, and her eyes shone. She said, "Oh, Mr. Roberts, I just wanted to say—it was beautiful." She caught her breath at the memory of it.

"Not bad, not bad at all," said Robert, smug as you please.

Myfanwy clasped her hands. "There is at Covent Garden you should be, Mr. Roberts. Not at Dinas." And into her eyes there flickered fear that one day this might be so, with Dinas become a waste land in his absence.

Róbert, who was inclined to agree with her, said, "A long time that will be, I am afraid." He yawned. "There is tired I am. A great strain, producing opera, isn't it? People don't realize." He strolled majestically away.

Myfanwy watched him go. Then she ran home, and cried herself to sleep.

And that night Robert Roberts woke up to find the stranger standing at the foot of his bed. He was very erect, very arrogant. "I have come for my fee, Robert Roberts," he said.

Well, the last performance of *Faust* was over. Robert was thinking of doing *The Gondoliers* next year, and he couldn't quite see the stranger fitting into that; so he smirked and said, "Can't go buying presentation clocks at this time of night, can we now?"

No sooner had he said it than he realized that his levity was ill-timed. Lightning seemed to dart from the stranger's eyes.

And his voice was like a whip as he replied, " I don't want a presentation clock. I want you! "

In that dreadful moment Robert realized who the stranger was. " No," he cried. " No! " He dived under the bed clothes. Then the thought that the stranger might seize him, bed and all, brought him to the surface again.

The stranger was waiting. Robert clasped his hands. " Spare me," he cried. " Take someone else, take one of the chorus. But not me. I'm too important."

The stranger smiled nasty. " If you can find a volunteer I'll take him instead. But somehow I don't think you will," he sneered.

" How—how long have I got? " asked Robert, his teeth chattering.

" I shall come at noon; wherever you are and without fail." He disappeared.

Not a wink did Robert Roberts sleep the rest of that night. He had to find a volunteer. But where? It was a difficult problem. An excellent producer, Robert, but not, perhaps, as popular as he felt he ought to be. All through the night he sat up in bed biting his nails; and as the first stars began to pale he sprang out of bed and dressed with trembling fingers.

Robert Roberts had had an idea.

Mrs. Jenkins dug her snoring husband in the ribs. " Someone at the door, Jenkins," she said. " Go and see. Postman with a registered, maybe."

Mr. Jenkins looked at his watch. " Not at seven on a Sunday, for sure," he muttered.

He groped his way downstairs. Grunting, he stooped and drew the bolts. Yawning, he turned the great key. Sighing, he opened the door.

" Robert Roberts, whatever you doing here? " he gasped.

Robert tried to make his voice sound casual. " Wondering I was if Myfanwy would care for a walk, now," he said. He patted his haversack. " Got a flask, see, and there is cutting some sandwiches I have been."

" Cutting sandwiches! " Myfanwy's dad looked at his watch again. " Early riser, maybe," he muttered.

He went to the foot of the stairs. " Myfanwy," he bellowed. " Get up now, good girl. Robert Roberts have come to take you walking."

There was a gasp from upstairs, the sound of someone leaping out of bed, the rustle of clothes. The two men waited. There was the clatter of shoes on the stairs. Myfanwy flew down; her

impetus carried her straight out of the front door and into the reluctant arms of Robert Roberts.

Primly he disengaged himself. "Thought you might like a walk, Myfanwy," he said, a little sheepishly.

She was too delighted to reply. She nodded, her eyes bright with joy. They set off in the clean, seven o'clock sunlight.

Mr. Jenkins went back to bed.

"Robert Roberts, mad with love for our Myfanwy," he said in wonder to Mrs. Jenkins.

At five minutes to twelve, an anxious Robert and a deliriously happy Myfanwy were over the hills and far away, eating fishpaste sandwiches on a shelf of rock that hung over a dreadful chasm.

"Why you keep looking at your watch, Robert?" asked Myfanwy, gazing at him with deep affection.

But at that moment, far, far below, the town clocks tinkled twelve in the summer-hazy, summer-lazy valleys. And then, strange it was on that cloudless day, a cloud swirled up out of the chasm and drifted, grey and sad, about Robert and Myfanwy.

And there, looming up big and terrible in the mist, stood the stranger. "I have come, Robert Roberts," he said, and his voice was like the thunder.

Myfanwy screamed. Robert outlined the situation to her in a few trembling words.

"No." Myfanwy clasped her hands. She lifted her tear-stained face to the stranger. "You shall not take him," she cried.

The stranger laughed nasty.

"Spare him. Take me instead," pleaded Myfanwy.

"Never!" cried Robert, trying, not very successfully, to sound convincing.

"Just as you please," said the stranger.

"Never!" repeated Robert, not even trying to sound convincing this time.

He was too late. The stranger was already bearing Myfanwy slowly down into the cloud-hung chasm. Robert watched them go. Then, moved perhaps by a too-tender conscience, he cried, "Myfanwy!"

Two white arms reached up towards him through the murk. "What is it, Robert?"

He came to his senses. "You—you've forgotten your mackintosh," he said lamely.

"No need for a mackintosh where she's going." The voice of the stranger boomed and echoed among the rocks.

But Robert's moment of weakness had cost him dear. He had leaned over a little too far. The rocky platform crumbled under

his weight. With a dreadful cry he, too, plunged into the abyss.

Terrible, wasn't it? The Zion Chapel Operatic Society never really recovered from the blow. Easy enough to replace Myfanwy, of course. But good producers do not grow on mulberry trees, and sad indeed to think that one moment's weakness cost the Society the best producer they ever had.

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SOLUTIONS to CALORIE PIE

on page 45

1. *4,000 calories a day for a hard-working male; he could have a pound of pork sausages for breakfast, a pound for lunch, a pound for tea, and rather less than half a pound for supper.*
2. *In St. Ronan's Well, by Sir Walter Scott.*
3. *He was Robin Hood's chaplain; no connection with tuckboxes, which derive from the French étoc, stock.*
4. *i. Frances Cornford; ii. Julius Caesar; iii. Dr. Johnson.*
5. *i. Sir John Falstaff; ii. Don Quixote de la Mancha.*
6. *Suet pastry, minced meat and onions, salt and pepper, and jam or treacle.*

COMING ATTRACTIONS!

in next month's ARGOSY

★ **MICHAEL GILBERT**

contributes his twenty-first Petrella adventure —a fast-paced, intriguing new story of smuggling in the East End of London

★ **EDITH PARGETER**

tells a grim fairy tale —that is strictly not for children

★ **LESLIE BONNET**

a new love drama—an alluring and exotic fragment of Chinoiserie

SLIPPERY CUSTOMER

What emerged was startling

BY STUART CRANMER

IT was one day during lunch that the subject first came up. Marjory, my girl friend, looked down at my feet reflectively and said, "What size shoes do you take?" I imagined she was inquiring from a laudable desire to buy slippers for my thirty-fifth birthday, approaching rather too fast for my peace of mind; replied, "Nines," and forgot the matter.

Three weeks later the subject cropped up again—this time at dinner. Marjory inserted two questions, very casually, into the midst of her usual blithe chatter: "A man would have to be quite tall to have feet larger than yours, wouldn't he?" and "Is it considered good taste for a man to wear those leather shoes with a fancy pattern on them?"

Now, these questions were no longer relevant to my birthday—we were celebrating it at the time, and I had received a handsome pullover—so, under cover of a general discussion about feet, I set myself to discover the reason.

What emerged was startling, and would have been worrying had anyone but Marjory been telling the story. But in her clear, practical voice it became merely something slightly unusual; something which, since there was no rational explanation, one accepted, as Marjory obviously had. This ability of Marjory's to accept an existing situation, with no curiosity or reforming instinct, is possibly the reason we did not marry long ago. I rarely make big decisions without some outside compulsion, and Marjory is not the person to supply it.

Marjory had first realized the feet were with her about two months earlier. She had pushed the supper table back, and moved her coffee and her novel on to the floor by the fire to take the chill off before she went to wash the dishes. As she pulled forward the armchair to act as a book-rest, she saw what she took to be a man hiding behind the curtains.

Being a woman of courage, and fortified by the thought that the flats above and below were inhabited by people who would

hear her should she find it necessary to scream, Marjory strode boldly to the window and pulled back the curtains. But there was merely a pair of shoes containing a pair of socks and—let there be no misunderstanding—feet.

I, too, was sceptical, because I did not see why a pair of shoes with socks in them need so definitely enclose feet. But Marjory had gone into the matter as thoroughly as she could without actually touching the feet. For some reason she shrank from doing this.

Apparently, there was this pair of shoes, brown leather with a design punched in it, carelessly tied. A pair of fawn, check socks rose from the shoes at such an angle that they could not possibly have stood up by themselves and, said Marjory, had there been nothing in the socks she would have been able to see inside them. This was not the case. There was just a blur. And the way the socks were stretched showed there were feet inside.

I inquired why, since she was apparently not frightened, she had not touched the feet. Her answer, although in character, surprised me. She said it would have seemed a liberty, somehow.

That was the first time she saw the feet, but after that they had been around quite a lot. There was the day she had glanced up from her seat by the fire to see the feet, wearing a pair of red leather slippers, perched on the fender. Marjory thought that if the feet had ever moved, if they had walked, or even twitched a little, she would have become frightened. As things were, she felt a little lonesome if she went home and they weren't there.

I was intrigued by the story. When Marjory offered me a cup of coffee, contrary to my usual custom, I decided for once I could use one, and climbed the two flights of stairs to her flat. I noticed Marjory looking at me in an amused way and, when our eyes met, she grinned outright and remarked mischievously, "I doubt if you'll see them."

I grinned back and said, "Here's hoping."

When we entered the flat, Marjory glanced round quickly; said, "They're not here tonight," in a disappointed voice; and went to make the coffee. I went over to poke the fire, vaguely surprised that it was still in. Marjory had been out for four or five hours, and it wasn't a fire that usually went at all well.

And then, as I turned from the fire, I noticed lying on the arm-chair, one fawn, check sock. There was an exclamation from the doorway as I picked it up.

Marjory walked in with a tray of coffee and biscuits. She put it down hastily and came to examine the sock. Taking it from me, she put in her hand in the time-honoured fashion, and

discovered a hole in the heel. "There's a hole," she said delightedly. "He must have made the coffee so that I'd mend it for him."

I said nothing. I was beginning to suspect Marjory of making a fool of me.

I drank my coffee hastily, muttered something about my bus, and was shown to the door by a somewhat wistful Marjory. She seemed to enjoy seeing me sprawled in her tidy room.

I took a last glance round that same room as I left, and came away with an ill-defined feeling of change. It seemed—well—less maidenly than hitherto. I shrugged away this impression. Marjory did not seem to have changed her ways at all and, in any case, such thoughts seemed a bit disloyal, for we'd been friendly a long time.

After this incident I avoided Marjory. This was due partly to my suspicion that I had been made a fool of, but partly to my realization that I had behaved boorishly on my last visit. After all, possibly she had been talking nonsense and expected me to join in the fun.

What I had been told by Marjory and my own impressions gradually became blurred in my mind, and by the time my brother arrived from East Africa the matter had passed completely from my memory. Brother Jim, home on three months' leave, had every intention of hitting the high spots.

Jim is tall and good-looking, and so had no difficulty, immediately on his arrival, in acquiring a girl: a young, blonde thing with not much sense but a perfect figure. She expressed a desire to go on the river, and Jim said to me, "You find a girl, too, and we'll make a foursome for a picnic on Sunday."

I was not acquainted with any girls quite as young or as blonde as Jim's, but I thought perhaps Marjory would fit in all right. She sounded pleased—but not excessively so—when I 'phoned her, and we arranged that she should be picked up on the Sunday about twelve o'clock.

I keep trying to forget that Sunday, although superficially it was just a pleasant, bright day when we enjoyed ourselves.

It was seeing Marjory again. I hadn't realized how pleased I should be, or how attractive she would look. I had wondered in a vague way how she would compare with the blonde, and if she would feel out of place. I need not have worried, as I knew from the moment she opened the door.

She was wearing a blue, fitted dress which revealed a figure at least as good as, if not better than, the blonde's. Her eyes were shining with pleasure, and there was a glow about her I did not remember having seen before.

We laughed at each other about nothing at all, she grabbed her coat and bag, and we ran down the stairs hand in hand to the car.

Rapid introductions were made, and we set off, Jim driving. We lunched at a pleasant inn on the way, and then took out a motor boat at Marlow.

It was a mild day, and we had packed a picnic tea—a rather luxurious one with cold chicken and wine. Jim kept eyeing the water as if he would have liked to swim, but finally gave up the idea in view of the coldness of the water.

Time passed gently. We decided to moor the boat and have our picnic on the bank if we could find a nice spot. Eventually we found one that did not appear to have any insects, although we had some fun with a wasp that seemed to like Marjory. Jim killed it in his manly fashion, and peace was restored.

After we had eaten, the young blonde thing stretched herself out in the sun, but Marjory sat and chatted sociably. Jim had begun to look interested—he'd already noticed her figure—when I suddenly remembered those feet.

" And do you still have the feet around, Marjory? " I said, in tones meant to convey that I could see a joke as well as she could.

She smiled at me, and said they had not been there for the last fortnight, she thought they were on holiday.

Jim was watching us both now, puzzled, but ready to be amused. He sat a little straighter, and hitched the knees of his trousers.

Marjory gave a little gasp, then said casually, " Do lots of men wear socks like that? "

" I guess so," said Jim, and began to tell of a queer incident that had happened to him concerning those very socks. He turned his foot to show us a neat darn in the heel of one, and said, " Do you think I could darn like that? "

The story went that one day he had been hunting madly for a pair of socks without holes. This was the only pair with one hole —all the rest had two or more. He had laid the sock needing repair on his chair, and gone to make some coffee. " Native servants never can make good coffee, old boy."

Leaving the coffee to simmer—he was quite definite about this fact—he did one or two other jobs, so that it was about fifteen minutes later when he returned. The coffee had disappeared. " Just clean disappeared, and the pan clean as a whistle." He made fresh coffee and then, remembering his socks, went back to darn them, only to discover that this had been done.

Marjory and I had sat silently through his story. When he said, " And how do you explain that? " we made non-committal

noises. Marjory deftly changed the subject, with a beseeching look at me.

The obvious happened, of course. Jim and Marjory were married—yesterday—and I was Jim's best man. They are on a honeymoon on the Riviera until Jim returns to his job.

I don't know if Marjory has told him the story. I fancy not. He is not a man to take kindly to tales of the supernatural, more especially when they concern himself and are backed by my definite observation.

Marjory made a very lovely bride, but her expression puzzled me. It was even more triumphant than the one women usually wear on these occasions. And, I've just realized, she looked curiously respectable and matronly. I'm wondering. I expect I shall always wonder.

You see, Jim has only one pair of slippers. They are quite well-worn, and they are—black. So, when is the chap with the red leather slippers going to turn up?

© Stuart Cranmer 1958

" You've been very cold to us lately. Are there others? "

Going Around the World in Eighty Days still gives us a magic-carpet thrill, but for Irish radio-officer F. G. Goodall—prizewinner in this year's Seafarers' Short Story Competition—voyaging to the other side of the world is all in the day's work. From the high seas, comes this Nanking adventure—setting out from Limehouse and finishing back home in Clonagalty.

FLOWERS FOR BUDDHA

BY F. G. GOODALL

MIKE RAFFERTY was a friendly chap with a grin on his freckled face that could bewitch a landlady into letting him stay another week when the rent was already a fortnight overdue; not that he ever left owing money, but all landladies didn't know that. One moment he'd be faced with an angry woman and the order to get out. Then Mike would ruffle his red hair, and his blue eyes would plead as his wide grin broke.

"Och, Mrs. Hawkins," he'd say, "and is it turnin' me out ye are this cold night?" The brogue of him held the lilt of fairy piping and was even more beguiling. But a landlady in Limehouse was one thing, and an angry Chinese mob another—as Rafferty, A.B. on s.s. *Mountglen*, discovered.

Before she reached Nanking, *Mountglen* had tramped across half the world with coal from Swansea to Rio and on to Tampico on the Mexican Gulf, where she loaded pitch in barrels for Semerang in Java: a long run in an eight-knot tramp from Tampico round the Cape of Good Hope to Java. The unloading of the cargo at Semerang was into lighters at an off-shore anchorage. Seamen hate that because wily boatmen will take them ashore for next to nothing, but for the return journey the fare rises to fantastic heights. It was the wet season, too, with Java fever and malaria at their worst, so most of *Mountglen*'s crew stayed aboard, cursing the damp heat and the mosquitoes and flies, attracted by the twinkling shore lights but ignoring the shouts of sampan men, "Johnee like go shoreside?"

With her holds full of copra, rubber, wet hides, and many other foul-smelling bales, *Mountglen* in ever colder weather

pushed up the South China Sea to Woosung at the entrance of the Yangtse. There she took her pilot and began the slow navigation up-river, anchoring at night until the grey dawn seeped over the low-lying banks of the broad, sluggish river whose reedy fringes crackled with crusted ice. Junks with sails like Venetian blinds slowly drifted downstream, every member of the family on board usefully employed, for even the doll-like children lent a tiny hand with ropes or the long steering oar. An eye was painted on either bow of these junks to let the clumsy-looking craft see where they were going.

After three days and nights *Mountglen* came up to the swarming city of Nanking on the muddy Yangtse-Kiang and, to the disgust of all hands, dropped her rusty anchor off-shore. But smiles took the place of frowns when the Chinese built a floating gangway across sampans lashed side by side, and the crew were able to go ashore and come back aboard as they pleased.

It was unfortunate for Mike Rafferty that his watchmate, Ian MacTavish, was hors de combat with a sprained ankle because, when ashore, the slow-speaking Scot often deterred Mike from committing some dangerous folly. That night in Manila, when a thieving, waterfront café owner had openly robbed them, big Mike had been on his feet in a flash, fists doubled, eyes sparkling at the prospect of a fight, and challenging all Manila to come on.

"Och laddie," MacTavish had said, hand on Mike's shoulder, "they're only wee mannies . . . now ye wouldn't be fechtin wi' such, would ye?"

"Well, no," Mike had agreed, and reluctantly left the café with regrets for the fight that hadn't come off. It was as well, for the Philippinos carried wicked knives and could use them.

So it happened that on the first night in Nanking Mike went ashore alone. He threaded his way through the maze of dimly-lit streets where box-like shops crowded the pavements. Slant-eyed shopkeepers, hands tucked in the sleeves of their gowns, eyed the white man as he rolled along the narrow ways that seethed with chattering humanity.

Sitting cross-legged in what was little more than a hole in a wall, a young Chinese bent close to some intricate embroidery on a woman's silken gown. He worked by the dim light of a smoky oil lamp, every now and then raising his eyes and rubbing them, only to return to his minute stitching with gold and silver threads. The man was weary, but he smiled back when Rafferty grinned at him.

On one end of a bamboo pole across his shoulder a coolie carried a small charcoal-fired stove, and from the other end of the pole swung a basket holding meat, fish, vegetables, and

heaven knows what else. As he shuffled along, he jangled a bell and offered to cook a meal on the spot. Rickshaw men howled and cursed as they tried to force a way through the crowds.

Rafferty, tiring of the sights, went into the Swatow Bar and drank more liquor than was good for him. It was around midnight when he came out into the frosty air that helped the bad drink to do its worst. At first he just lurched along, penetrating ever deeper into the network of narrow alleys far from the city centre. He stopped to buy a blue cotton smock and conical hat such as coolies wear. He donned both, and many sideways, expressionless glances were given to the more-than-usually-mad foreign devil.

All would have been well if Rafferty had not gone into that joss house where, to the clash of cymbals, jangle of bells, and wail of one-stringed fiddles, in a fog of incense some Chinese paid homage to a large jade Buddha seated cross-legged and contemplative. The Chinese paid no heed when Rafferty came among them, until he took up a small earthenware pot, suspended by three chains, in which glowed a charcoal fire. Then the uproar broke out.

Rafferty had enough sense left to get out quickly. As he ran he held on to the fire-pot. Close behind him surged an angry, screaming mob, throwing stones, brandishing knives and lengths of bamboo. Here the streets, just narrow ways between godowns, were not so crowded. He raced across some waste land but, hampered by the fire-pot, by the numbers of gaping Chinese in his way, and by his feet still somewhat tangled because of the bad liquor he had drunk, Rafferty lost ground to the murderous crowd behind him.

Suddenly part of the city wall loomed up. The road through it narrowed to a bottleneck. Here Rafferty got a little ahead of the crowd, but things looked very bad for him.

On a piece of waste land bordering the river, two old Chinamen talked gravely. On the front of their long, black gowns was embroidered in white a Chinese character: the sign of their mysterious, powerful, and feared Tong or secret society. From a paper wrapping one man took a piece of meat, bowed to his companion, and said, "Pray accept my worthless contribution to our meal, Ah Foo."

"Accepted with profound gratitude, Wang Lien," replied Ah Foo. "I—well, I have only this small amount of salt."

"Salt, too, is necessary to life," smiled Wang. "Now we have but a fire to make," he said, searching without success for matches. "Have you any matches, Ah Foo?" he asked.

Ah Foo slowly shook his head. "Alas, Wang Lien, we have no fire." Then the love of the Chinese for a story—any story—made Ah Foo recount a tale with which Wang Lien was quite familiar; but it was a story, so Wang listened politely.

"How similar this is to the manner in which our Tong began," said Ah Foo, "for then three men were crossing the Gobi desert, each one by himself. One of them had meat, the second, salt, and the third carried fire. The man with meat met him with salt, but they still lacked fire to cook the meat. Then, out of the distance, came the third man with fire, who joined the other two, and they cooked the meat and made a meal together. From that meeting was born the first Tong . . ."

Suddenly the quiet was broken by yells and the clatter of many feet. "What is it, Ah Foo?" queried Wang Lien.

He soon had his answer, for Rafferty, swinging the fire-pot by its chains, and gasping as he ran, stumbled to a halt before the Tong men. At their backs gurgled the dark river: Rafferty was at bay.

"You see, Wang Lien," said Ah Foo, "the fire and a strange man dressed as a Chinese." Protectingly he put his arm round Rafferty's shoulders.

At the sight of the dread characters on the gowns of Wang Lien and Ah Foo, the angry mob halted, the howling ceased, the word "Tong" was whispered, and scared glances were cast at the two old men.

The crowd rapidly melted away until Wang Lien, Ah Foo, and Rafferty were alone. They collected bits of wood, built a fire, and lighted it from the fire-pot. Then they cooked and ate the meat, and later saw Rafferty safely back to his ship.

Still clutching the fire-pot, Rafferty mounted *Mountglen*'s gangway. "What's that you've got, Mike?" laughed Ian MacTavish, who had hobbled to meet him at the top.

"'Tis terrible cold these nights," grinned Rafferty, "so it's a sort of fire I'm carryin' to be keepin' meself war-rm. I'm takin' ut home to Clonagalty for the missus to grow flowers in."

Sometimes, when Mike is home from the sea, he dreamily puffs his pipe and, eyes on the fire-pot, he says, "That's a gr-rand flower pot I brought ye home from China, Mary."

"It is, Mike," she agrees.

So that's where the fire-pot is now, and perhaps Buddha likes flowers as well as incense.

© F. G. Goodall 1958

When you have read this copy of ARGOSY, why not pass it on to a member of H.M. Forces?

THE DARLING BUDS OF MAY

Into the bosom of the Larkin family—bucolic Pop, buxom Ma, Zinnia, Petunia, Victoria, Montgomery, Primrose, and the black-haired, soft-eyed Mariette—arrives young Mr. Charlton from the Inland Revenue, demanding a tax return from Pop.

Wealthy scrap-dealer, with two TV sets, a cocktail cabinet, and his eye on a Rolls, Pop lives on the fat of the land in his Kentish paradise, and never pays a penny of income tax.

Kept to supper, where fat geese in quest of titbits wreathe sinuous necks round his legs, poor Mr. Charlton becomes, as intended, intoxicated with Mariette's alluring charms—and with something more potent mixed by Pop.

Their whole uproarious world revolves round him . . .

WHEN Mr. Charlton came back from the kitchen, carrying trays of ice, Pop Larkin mixed the new drink and tasted it with slow, appraising tongue and eye. " More perfick than ever! "

Everything was more perfick, Mr. Charlton kept telling himself. The scent of gardenia was more perfick. It too was stronger than ever. He laughed immoderately, for no reason, and at length, looking for the first time straight into the dark searching eyes of Mariette with neither caution nor despair, " Mariette," he said, " what is the scent you're wearing? "

" Come and sit over here, and I'll tell you."

Mr. Charlton moved to sit on the other side of the table. Rising abruptly, he stood stunned. It seemed to him that something remarkable had happened to Pop. Pop had disappeared.

" I didn't see Pop go out," he said. " Where's Pop gone? "

Ma began shrieking.

" I'm under here! " Pop said.

" Under me! I'm sitting on his lap," Ma said. " Why don't you ask Mariette if she'll sit on yours? "

BY H. E. BATES

ARGOSY continues his gay, new novel

Mariette, who needed no asking, sat on Mr. Charlton's lap. The illusion of being caressed in a silken, sinuous, maddening way by the goose's neck returned to Mr. Charlton as he felt her silken legs cross his own. A sensation that for the second time his blood was turning white, while being at the same time on fire, coursed completely through him. The soles of his feet started tingling. The scent of gardenia overwhelmed him like a drug.

"Tell me what the scent is," Mr. Charlton said.

"Gardenia. Do you like it?"

"Like it? Like it?" Mr. Charlton said madly. "Like it?"

With extraordinarily soft hands Mariette took his own and held them high round her waist, just under her breasts. With stupefying tenderness she started to rock him backwards and forwards, with the result that Mr. Charlton could not see straight. His eyes were simply two quivering balls revolving unrestrainedly in his head.

"Well, getting late," Pop said. "Hitch up a bit, Ma, and I'll mix another before we go to shut-eye."

Pop reappeared presently from underneath the salmon canopy of Ma and announced that he was going to mix a new one this time.

"How about a Chauffeur? Dammit, the Rolls has to have a Chauffeur," he said. He stood earnestly consulting the guide. "One third vermouth, one third whisky, one third gin, dash of angostura. Sounds perfick. Everybody game?"

Everybody was game. Mr. Charlton was very game. He said so over and over again. Mariette held his hands more closely against her body and a little higher than before, and Mr. Charlton let his head rest against the velvety, downy nape of her dark neck.

"You're my goose. My gardenia," he said.

"Don't you think," Mariette said, "it's soon time for bed?"

Some moments later Mr. Charlton had drained the Chauffeur in

two gulps and was addressing Ma and Pop in what he thought were solid, steadfast tones of gratitude.

"Can never thank you. Never thank you. Never be able to thank you." He shook on his feet, grasped at air with aimless hands, and started jiggling like a fish. "Should be a cocktail called gardenia! A sweet one—"

"I'll make one," Pop said. "I'll think one up."

"And one called Mariette," Mr. Charlton said. "Sweet one, too!" He staggered violently and some time later was vaguely aware of walking arm-in-arm with Mariette towards his bed on the billiard table. There was no light in the billiard room.

He felt filled with inconsolable happiness and laughed with wild immoderation, once again feeling her legs brush against him like the goose-neck, in the darkness. Once again too, he called her a gardenia, and stretched out groping hands to touch her.

Instead, unsurprised, he found himself kneeling by the billiard table, caressing in the corner pocket a solitary, cool, abandoned ball.

"Where are you? Where are you?" he said. "Mariette—"

Mr. Charlton got up and fell down, breaking the thrushes' eggs in his pocket as he fell.

"Climb up," Mariette said. Mr. Charlton found it impossible to climb up, and Mariette started pushing him. "Ups-a-daisy. Up you go. I'll get your collar off."

Meanwhile Pop, who was sitting up in bed in his shirt, thinking of the evening sunshine, the meadows shining so beautifully and so golden with buttercups, and the prospect of summer growing to maturity all about his paradise, decided that the only thing to make the day more perfick was a cigar.

"I'm the same as Churchill," he said. "Like a good cigar."

He lit the cigar and sat watching Ma undress herself. The thing he really loved most about Ma, he had long since decided, was that she didn't have to wear corsets. She didn't need them; her figure was all her own; pure and natural as could be.

"Ma, I've been thinking," he said. "When does Mariette expect this baby?"

"She can't make up her mind."

From the depths of her transparent petunia canopy, as it floated down over the global map of her white, wide territory, Ma spoke with her customary air of unconcern.

Smoking his cigar, gazing thoughtfully through the open window to a night of warm May stars, as if pondering again on summer and the way it would soon embroider with its gold and green his already perfick paradise, Pop made a pronouncement. "I'm a bit worried about Mister Charlton. I don't think that young man's got it in 'im," he said. "At least not yet."

Mr. Charlton woke late and to a dark, disquieting impression. It was that he was lying alone in the centre of a large flat green field. A cold storm was raging about him. Overhead drummed peals of thunder.

Agony taught him some moments later that the thunder rolled from somewhere inside his own head and that the field was the billiard table, from which he was about to fall. He got up off the table and groped with uncertain agony about the semi-darkened room, white hands limp at his sides, stringy and strengthless, like portions of tired celery.

He was wearing Mariette's pyjamas, which were silk, of a pale blue colour, with a pattern of either pink roses or carnations all over them—he was too distraught to tell which. He could not remember putting the pyjamas on. He could only suppose Mariette had put them on. He could not remember that either.

Presently, after managing to pull on his trousers over his pyjamas, he groped his way out of the billiard room. In the kitchen the apparition of Ma, now wearing a parma-violet jumper instead of the salmon one, overrode all other objects, like a circus elephant. She was making toast and frying eggs and bacon. His hands trembled as they grasped a chair.

"Ah, there you are, Mister Charlton. One egg or two?" Ma, in her customary fashion, started laughing like a jelly, her voice a carillon. "Two eggs or three? Sleep all right?"

He sat down and thought that even if wild dogs had begun to chase him he would never again have the strength to move.

"Cuppa tea?" A heavy weight, like a descending pile-driver, hit the table, shaking cups and cutlery. It was a cup. "Like a drop o' milk in it?" With shaking bosom Ma roared happily again. "Cow's or Johnnie Walker?"

Mr. Charlton prayed silently over the comforting fumes of tea.

"Mariette waited for you but you didn't seem to come so she's gone for a ride to get her appetite up," Ma said. "She'll be back any minute now. Pop's feeding the pigs. He's had one breakfast. But he'll want another."

Life, Mr. Charlton felt, was ebbing away from him. In his cup large tea-leaves swam dizzily round and round, the black wreckage of disaster.

"You never said how many eggs," Ma said. "One or two? How do you like 'em? Turned over?"

"I—"

A moment later a rough sledge-hammer hit Mr. Charlton in the middle of the back.

"How's the tax-man?" Pop said. "How's my friend? All right, old man? Sleep well? Perfick morning, ain't it?"

Whereas overnight Mr. Charlton's veins had run white, in crazy, voluptuous courses, he now felt them to be some shade of pale, expiring green. There was also something seriously wrong with his intestines. They were dissolving under waves of acid. He could no longer claim them for his own.

"I don't think Mr. Charlton feels very well," Ma said.

"No?" Pop said. "Pity. Didn't sleep very well? Potted the white, eh?" Pop barked with violent laughter at his joke. "Hair of the dog I should say."

Mr. Charlton had never heard of hair of the dog. Pop sat down at the table and drummed on it with the handles of his knife and fork, whistling *Come to the cook-house door, boys* through his teeth.

" What's your programme this morning, old man? Like to cōme with me and take the pig over to the bacon factory? "

" I think I shall have to go hōme."

Faintly Mr. Charlton spoke for the first time, his voice full of pallid distress. Echoes of his words rang through his head in hollow tones, as through a sepulchre.

" Don't say that, old man," Pop said. " We was looking forward to having you the whole weekend. I want to show you the place. I got thirty-two acres here altogether. Lovely big medder at the back. Beautiful stretch o' river. Perfick. Do any fishing? "

While Pop was speaking Ma set before him a plate of three eggs, four six-inch rashers of home-cured bacon, three very thick brown sausages, and a slice of fried bread. Pop attacked this with the precipitaté virility and desperation of a man who has not seen food for some long time. In an excruciating moment the last of Mr. Charlton's intestines got ready to dissolve.

Suddenly Pop slapped down his knife and fork, troubled.

" Something wrong? " Ma said.

" Don't taste right."

" You forgot the ketchup, you loony, that's why."

" Gor blimey, so I did. Knowed there was summat wrong somewhere."

Pop reached out, grabbed the ketchup bottle, and shook an ocean of scarlet all over his breakfast.

Mr. Charlton shut his eyes. This grave mistake made him think that he was on the deck of a sinking ship, in a hurricane. He opened his eyes with great haste, and the deck came up at him.

" Hullo there, bright eyes. Good morning. How are we this morning? "

The astral figure of Mariette, fresh in yellow shirt and jodhpurs, was all that Mr. Charlton felt he needed to set him weeping. The pristine, cheerful voice was beyond his range of thought. He tried to say something and failed, faintly.

" Mister Charlton doesn't feel all that well," Ma said. " He says he might have to go home."

Pop belched with enormous pleasure, as usual surprising himself. He struck his chest with the handle of the fork, as if in stern reproval. " Home, my foot. Stop worrying, old man. That's the trouble with you office fellers. You all worry too much by half. After all, here today and gone tomorrow."

It was not tomorrow, Mr. Charlton thought, that he was worried about. Unless he could find some speedy, drastic remedy he would, he was convinced, be gone today.

" Heavens, I'm hungry," Mariette said.

She sat down at the table, stirred a cup of tea, and started laughing. Her voice put stitches into Mr. Charlton's head: stabbing lines of them, on hot needles.

"See something funny out riding?" Pop said. "Like the Brigadier's sister?"

"I was just smiling at Mr. Charlton. He's still got the pyjamas on." She started laughing again, and Mr. Charlton could not help feeling there was some sinister, hidden meaning in the word "smiling." "Oh, that was a laugh, getting them on last night! First, we couldn't get one lot of trousers off, and then we couldn't get the other lot on. Oh, Mr. Charlton, you were a scream. Absolute scream."

Mr. Charlton, who began to feel, among other things, that he was not grown-up, did not doubt it. Everything was a scream. His whole body, his entire mind, and his intestines were a scream.

"Most of the time you were making love to a billiard ball in the side pocket."

Pop started choking.

"I said you potted the white, didn't I?" he shouted. "Ain't that what I said, Ma?" With immense glee Pop beat a tattoo on the tablecloth with the handles of his knife and fork. "Potted the white. Damn funny. Just what I said."

"Tonight I'll make you a proper bed up," Ma said. "In the bottom bathroom. Nobody uses it very much now we've got the new one upstairs."

"I really think," Mr. Charlton said, his voice limp, "I'd better go home."

In a sudden gesture of fond solicitude Pop put an arm round Mr. Charlton's shoulder. "You know, Charley boy," he said, "I wish your name was Charley instead of Cedric. It's more human."

"Please call me Charley if you wish," Mr. Charlton said and felt once again like weeping.

"What I was going to say, Charley boy," Pop went on, "is this, old man. I think you need a Larkin Special."

Mr. Charlton had no time to ask what a Larkin Special was before Pop was out of the room, across the passage, and into the living-room on the other side. Presently there were noises from the Spanish galleon, the monster cocktail cabinet that could only have been moulded, Mr. Charlton thought, by a man of evil, demoniac designs.

"That'll put you as right as a lamplighter in no time," Ma said. "Acts like a charm."

"A nice walk after breakfast," Mariette said, "and you'll be on top of the world." Mr. Charlton felt that that in fact was where he was, but in the act of falling. Mariette was now eating bacon, eggs, large burnished brown sausages, and fried bread. "We could walk across the meadow and have a look at the motor boat if you like."

"Motor boat?" At the same moment some curious reflex of thought made Mr. Charlton remember the buff-yellow tax form. He hadn't seen it since sharing his boiled eggs with the twins the previous day. "You've got a motor boat?"

"Nice one. Little beauty. We keep it in the boathouse on the other side of the meadow."

"Pop took it in exchange for a debt," Ma explained.

"Mrs. Larkin," Mr. Charlton began to say. He felt suddenly, in a guilty fashion, that he ought to make some sort of atonement with himself for all that had happened. He was actually bothered by a sense of duty. "I don't suppose you've seen that buff-yellow form—"

"Coming up, coming up, coming up," Pop said. "There you are, Charley, old man. Larkin Special. Don't ask what's in it Don't stare at it. Don't think. Just drink it down. In ten minutes you'll feel perfick again."

Pop set before a demoralized Mr. Charlton, on the breakfast table, what Mr. Charlton could only think was a draught of bull's blood.

"I think I should go and lie down—"

"Don't think a thing," Pop said. "Drink it. Say to 'ell wiv everything and drink it."

Mr. Charlton hesitated. His intestines rolled.

"I can vouch for it," Ma said.

The soft dark eyes of Mariette smiled across the table. The familiar astral vision of cool olive skin against the light lemon shirt, of dark hair, and the firm treasured breasts that Mr. Charlton had almost clasped the previous evening, revived an inspiring, momentary recollection of his lost white fire.

He ducked his head and drank.

"Now I must get cracking," Pop said. "I got a bit of a deal to do about some straw. I got the new deep-freeze to pick up. And the pigs. And the port." With fond assurance he laid a hand on Mr. Charlton's shoulder. "Charley, old man," he said, "by the time I get back you'll feel perfick."

For some time Mr. Charlton sat in tentative silence, reawaking. A feeling of slow intestinal restoration made him give, once or twice, a tender sigh. He grasped slowly that the thunder in his head had now become mere singing, like distant vespers in a minor key.

"*Feeling more yourself now?*" Mariette was eating toast and golden marmalade. As she opened her mouth to eat he saw, for the first time, how beautifully white her teeth were and how pink, in a pure rose-petal shade, her tongue now appeared as it darted out and caught at golden shreds of marmalade.

He even found himself thinking of gardenia, its compelling, torturing night-scent, and the pure whiteness of its flower.

"It's absolutely wonderful in the woods this morning," Mariette said. "All the bluebells out. Millions of them. And the moon-daisies. It's hot too and the nightingales had already started when I was coming back. You're not really going home today?"

A lyrical wave passed over Mr. Charlton. With distaste he remembered his office: the In tray, the Out tray, the files, the other chaps, the inkstained desks, the chatter of typewriters.

"If you're sure it's no trouble—"

"Trouble!" Ma said. "We want you. We love to have you."

"I've finished," Mariette said. "Like to get a breath of air?"

Mr. Charlton went to the door and stood in the sun. With reviving heart he stared across Pop's paradise of junk, scratching hens, patrols of geese, and graveyards of rusty iron, in the middle of which Montgomery was milking goats under a haystack. Over all this a sky as blue as the thrushes' eggs that had come to disaster in his pocket spread with unblemished purity. The near fringes of meadows had become, overnight, white with moon-daisies, drifts of summer snow. A cuckoo called and was answered by another, the notes like those of tender horns, the birds hidden in oak trees, among curtains of thickest olive flower.

"How do you feel now?" Mariette said.

The pale face of Mr. Charlton broadened into its first unsteady daylight smile.

"A little more perfick than I was."

By Saturday night Ma's new deep-freeze was installed. By Sunday morning, three nine-pound geese, well-stuffed with sage and onion, were sizzling in a pure white electric oven that could have spoken, Mr. Charlton thought, if spoken to. A light breeze drove with frailest spinnings of air through the bluebell wood and bore across the hot yard the delicious aroma of roasting birds.

Ma, who loved colour, cooked in a canary-yellow pinafore with big scarlet pockets, and at intervals shouted across the yard either to Pop or Mariette, Mr. Charlton or the children, or whoever happened to be there, a demand for instructions about the meal.

"What sort of vegetables do you fancy? Asparagus? I got green peas and new potatoes but shout if you want anything different." It turned out that Montgomery wanted brown braised onions; the twins, Yorkshire pudding, and Primrose, baked potatoes. "Fair enough," Ma said, "as long as we know."

At eleven o'clock, by which time Pop was no longer in the yard, Ma shouted that it was already so hot in the kitchen that she'd be sick by the time the meal was served.

"What say we have it outside?" she called. "Under the walnut tree?"

By noon Mariette, dressed in neat sky-blue linen shorts and an open-necked vermilion blouse, her legs bare, was laying a white cloth on a long table underneath a walnut tree that overshadowed, like a faintly fragrant umbrella, the only civilized stretch of grass near the house, on the south side, beside which Ma would later grow patches of petunia and zinnia, her favourite flowers. It was cool and dark there under the thickening walnut leaves, out of the sun, and Mr. Charlton helped her by bringing cutlery from the house on papier mâché trays brightly decorated with hunting scenes, race-meetings, or pointers carrying birds.

At half past twelve Pop startled everybody by driving into the yard in the Rolls-Royce, a prewar landaulette in black, with straw-coloured doors that actually looked as if they had been made of

plaited basketwork. The horn, sounding with discreet harmonious distinction, brought everyone running to the centre of the rusty, dusty graveyard of junk and iron.

Pop stopped the car, with triumphant, imperial pride. "Here it is," he shouted. "Ourn!"

Before anyone could speak he leapt down to the doors, proudly pointing. "Monogram," he said. "Look, Ma, monograms on the doors."

"Royal?" Ma said.

"Duke, I think," Pop said. "The feller didn't know. Anyway, duke or viscount or some toff of some sort."

Ma was dazzled. She took several paces forward and touched the gleaming body-work.

"All in!" Pop said. "Everybody in. Everybody who wants a ride get in!"

Everybody, including Mr. Charlton, got into the Rolls-Royce. On the wide spacious seats of dove-grey upholstery, upon which heavy cords of tasselled yellow silk hung at the windows, there was plenty of room for everybody, but the twins sat on Mr. Charlton's lap. Ma herself sat in the centre of the back seat, her pinafore spread out crinoline-wise, almost in royal fashion, her turquoise-ringed hands spread on her yellow pinafore.

Soon an entranced look crept like a web across her face, only her eyes moving as they rolled gently from side to side, taking in the smallest details.

"I wish I had my hat on," she said at last. "I don't feel right without my hat on."

"Got a big picnic basket in the boot," Pop said. "Corkscrews an' all."

"It's got vases for flowers," Ma said. She leaned forward and fingered with delicacy a pair of silver horn-like vases fixed below the glass screen that divided the back seat from the front.

"Notice anything else?" Pop called. "Have a good dekko, all round. Want you to notice one more thing, Ma. Have a good dekko."

After several seconds of silence, in which Ma's eyes revolved on a slow axis of exploration in pure wonderment, Ma confessed that she saw nothing more.

"That thing like the bit off the end of the carpet sweeper," Pop yelled. In his own delight he laughed in his customary ringing fashion. "Mind it don't bite you."

"No," Ma said. "No." Her mouth expired air in a long incredulous wheeze. "No—"

"Speakin'-tube!" Pop said. "Pick it up. Say something down it. Give me an order. Say, 'Home James!'—summat like that."

Ma, in possession of the end of the speaking-tube, sat utterly speechless.

"Give me an order," Pop said. "I can hear whatever you say perfickly well in front here. Go on, Ma."

Ma breathed into the speaking-tube in a voice pitched in a minor key of desolation. "I don't know whether I like it," she said. "They'll be putting the price of fish and chips up when they see us roll up in this."

"Never!" Pop said. "They'll be paying *us*."

The receiving end of the speaking apparatus was just above the head of Mr. Charlton, who was sitting next to Pop in the driving seat. The voices of Victoria and Primrose began to shriek into his ears like a gabble of excited young ducks. "Take us for a ride! Take us for a ride! Take us for a ride!"

Pop let in the clutch and started to steer a course of slow elegance between a pile of discarded oil-drums and a big galvanized-iron swill-tub. No breath of sound came, for a full minute, from either the Rolls or its passengers.

Then Ma said, "Like riding on air. Not a squeak anywhere. Must be paid for."

"Cash down," Pop said.

He pressed the horn. An orchestration of low notes, harmonious, smooth as honey, disturbed into slight flutterings a batch of young turkeys sunning themselves in the lee of the pigsties.

"That's the town one," Pop explained. He flicked a switch with a fingernail. "Now, hark at this. Country. Open road."

A peremptory, urgent snarl, like the surprise entry of symphonic brass, tore the peaceful fabric of the yard's livestock to pieces. A whole flotilla of white ducks sprang into the air and raced like hurdlers over rusty junk, empty boxes, and feeding troughs. Brown hens flew like windy paper bags in all directions, shedding feathers.

"Special fittin'," Pop explained. "Chap who owned it once lived in Paris or somewheres."

He completed with slow, imperial pride the course of the yard, now blowing the town horn, now the snarl.

"Comfortable in the back, ain't it, Ma? Make a nice bed, don't you think?"

Ma, who had recovered equilibrium, now spoke down the speaking-tube, shaking like a jelly. "Home, James. Else them geese'll burn."

Pop responded with the honeyed notes of the town horn and the Rolls, like a ship gliding to anchorage in smooth waters, skirted with a final swing of silent elegance past a strong black alp of pig manure.

"Perfick, ain't it?" Pop said. "Ain't it perfick?"

Ma, who had stopped laughing, breathed hard before she spoke again. "I got to have flowers in the vases," she said, her voice full of a pleasure so deep that it was at once loving and lovable in humility. "Every time we go out we got to have flowers."

Back at the house everybody alighted and Ma once again stroked, with touching affection, the shining chariot wings, her huge body reflected in their black curves with a vast transfiguration of yellow and scarlet, distorted as in a comic mirror at a fair.

" Gor blimey, I must run," she said suddenly. " I haven't even started the apple sauce."

As Ma ran towards the house Mariette remembered the table under the walnut tree and took Mr. Charlton's hand. Pop remembered the port and called after a dutifully-retreating Mr. Charlton, " Charley boy, like to do summat for me while you're helping Mariette? Put the port on ice, old man, will you? Three bottles. Two red and one white. You'll find two ice buckets in the cocktail cabinet. Give 'em plenty of ice, old man."

At the same time Montgomery stood staring across the yard in the direction of the road.

" Pop," he said, " I think we got a visitor. I think it looks like the Brigadier."

Across the yard a straight six-foot human straw was drifting. It was dressed in a suit of tropical alpaca, once yellowish, now bleached to whitish-fawn, that looked as if it had recently been under a steamroller.

It was the Brigadier all right, Pop said, and leaned one hand on the front wing of the Rolls with casual pride, raising the other in greeting. He wondered what the Brigadier wanted and where his sister was and said he betted the old whippet had left him for the day.

" General," he called, " what can I do for you? "

" Hail," the Brigadier said. The voice was low and cryptic. " Well met, Larkin."

At closer range it was to be seen that the Brigadier's elbows had been patched with squares of paler-coloured material that appeared to have been torn from pillowslips. The cuffs of his jacket sleeves had been trimmed more or less level with scissors and then sewn back. His socks were yellow. The hat worn on the back of his head resembled more than anything a frayed bee-skep and seemed to be worn so far back in order to avoid his extraordinary, extensive white eyebrows, altogether too large for the rest of his cadaverous face, which stuck above his pale blue eyes like two salty prawns.

These prawns were repeated on his upper lip in stiff moustaches, which contrasted sharply with cheeks consisting entirely of purple veins. The chin was resolute and looked like worn pumice-stone. The neck was long and loose and held entirely together by a rigid bolt of fiery crimson, the Adam's apple, which seemed over the course of time to have worn the soiled shirt collar to shreds.

The Brigadier shook hands with Pop, at the same time recognizing in Pop's demeanour the divinity of new possession. He held the Rolls-Royce in flinty stare.

" Not yours? "

" Just got it."

" Bless my soul."

Pop made breezy gestures of pride. He wanted instantly to reveal possession of the monograms and then decided against it. It was too much all at one time, he thought.

"Hellish costly to run?"

"Well, might be, can't tell, might be," Pop said. "But worth it. Always flog it."

Sooner or later, in his energetic way, Pop flogged most things.

"Bless my soul." The Brigadier looked at the car with closer, microscopic inspection. "What's all this?"

"Monogram."

"Good God." In moments of humour the Brigadier drew on dry resources of solemnity. "No crown?"

The remark was lost on Pop, who was dying to demonstrate the horn's orchestral variations.

"Well," the Brigadier said, "I mustn't linger. Down to staff work." Pop laughed in his usual ringing fashion and said he betted a quid the General wanted a subscription.

"Wrong," the Brigadier said. "Not this time."

"Well, that's worth a drink," Pop said. "What about a snifter?"

"Trifle early, don't you think?" the Brigadier said. "Not quite over the yard-arm yet, are we?"

"When I want a drink," Pop said, "I have a drink. Wevver it's early or wevver it ain't."

The Brigadier, after a minor pretence at refusal, chose to have a whisky-and-soda. Pop said first that he'd have a Guinness and then changed his mind and said he'd have a beer called Dragon's Blood with a dash of lime in it. The Brigadier looked astonished at this extraordinary combination but followed Pop into the house without a word.

In the sitting-room he found it hard to concentrate even on the whisky-and-soda because of powerful, torturing odours of roasting geese that penetrated every corner of the house, delicious with sage-and-onion stuffing. He sat most of the time with his glass on his right knee, where it successfully concealed a hole that mice might have gnawed.

"Might as well come straight to the point," the Brigadier said. "Fact is, Larkin, I'm in a God-awful mess."

"Wimmin?"

The Brigadier looked extremely startled. The prawns of his eyebrows seemed to leap out. He seemed about to speak and then drank with eagerness at the whisky-and-soda instead. "No, no, no," he said eventually. "Bad enough, but not that bad."

Pop knew that the Brigadier's sister, who resembled more than anything a long hairpin, on the top of which she generally wore a cloche hat that looked like a pink thimble, was presumed to lead him a hell of a dance on most occasions and in all directions. Among other things he felt that she never gave the Brigadier enough to eat: a terrible thing.

"No, it's this damn Gymkhana," the Brigadier said. "That Bolshie Fortescue had a God-awful row with the Committee, Friday, and has withdrawn from the field."

"Always was a basket."

"Not only withdrawn *from* the field," the Brigadier said, "but withdrawn *the* field."

"Means you've got nowhere to hold the damn thing."

"Bingo," the Brigadier said.

In a soft voice Pop called Mr. Fortescue a bloody sausage and remembered Mariette. The Gymkhana was in a fortnight's time. It might be the last chance she'd ever get to ride in the jumps before she had the baby. She was mad on jumping; her heart was set on horses and all that sort of thing.

"Nothing to worry about," Pop said. "You can hold it in my medder."

"Don't let me rush you into a decision, Larkin," the Brigadier said. "You don't have to decide—"

"Good grief," Pop said. "Nothing to decide. The medder's there, ain't it? All I got to do is get the grass cut. I'll get the grass cut this week and things'll be perfick."

The Brigadier was so much touched by this that he nervously held his glass in his left hand and started poking a finger into the hole in his right trouser knee, a habit about which his sister had already scolded him acidly twice at breakfast.

"Can't thank you enough, Larkin," he said. He knew the Committee would be eternally grateful. "Never be able to thank you."

Out of politeness he rose to go. Before he was on his feet Pop was insisting on another snifter and Ma, hearing the tinkle of ice in glasses, called from the kitchen, "What about one for the old cook in here? What's she done today?"

The Brigadier, under indeterminate protest, had a second whisky-and-soda. Pop had a change of mind and had a whisky-and-soda too. Ma ordered beer because she was parched from cooking and came to the sitting-room door to drink it from a big glass that spilt foam down her hands.

"Bung-ho," she said to the Brigadier. "How's your sister today?"

"Gone to see an aunt," the Brigadier said. Now that Ma had opened the kitchen door the smell of browning goose-flesh was attacking him in even more frontal, more excruciating waves. "Over in Hampshire. Day's march away."

"Sunday dinner all on your lonesome?" Ma said.

"Not quite that bad." The torturing waves of sage-sharp fragrance from roasting geese made him suddenly feel more heady than even the whisky-and-soda had done on his empty stomach. "I shall waffle down to the pub and grab a bite of cold."

"Cold on Sundays?" Ma was deeply shocked. "You wouldn't catch Pop having cold on Sundays. Why don't you stay here and eat with us?"

"No, no, really no. No, thanks all the same, really—"

"Encore," Pop said. "More the merrier. Perfick."

"Bless my soul, with all your brood—"

"Of course," Ma said. "Cold, my foot."

"Ma," Pop said, "pity you didn't put that leg o' pork in after all." Ma had calculated that, within reason, three nine-pound geese ought to be enough. "Too late now, I suppose?"

He seemed quite disappointed as Ma said, "Not unless you want to eat about five o'clock," and went away kitchenwards. He hated having to skimp on joints and things; it made it hard work for the carver.

From the kitchen Ma called a little later, "Come here a minute, Pop, I want you. Lift the geese out of the oven for me, will you? I want to baste them."

Pop went into the kitchen, realizing as soon as he went through the door that the call was after all merely a ruse to get him away from the Brigadier. Ma was standing by the window, arms folded like huge white vegetable marrows across her bolstered bosom, looking towards the walnut tree. "Take a look at that," she said.

Under the tree, at the dinner table, cloth and cutlery having been laid, Mariette and Mr. Charlton were coolly sitting some distance apart from each other, absorbed in the Sunday papers.

Ma made noises of puzzled disgust, which Pop echoed.

"What's wrong with 'em?"

"Wrong? Don't he know his technique?" Ma said.

"Very like do better on the boat this afternoon," Pop said. "There's some very good quiet places up the river."

Ma, as if she could not bear the sight any longer, turned away to stir the apple sauce with a wooden spoon as it simmered away in a new bright aluminium pan. After looking at it critically she decided it needed a touch of something and dropped into the steaming olive-yellow purée a lump of butter as big as a tennis ball.

"Brigadier looks seedy, I think, don't you?" she said. Pop agreed. He felt immensely sorry for the Brigadier. "Trouble with these people they never get enough to eat. Like Mr. Charlton. Half starved."

Pop agreed with that too. "Cold at the pub, Sundays," he said, as if this was the depths of deplorable gastronomic misery. "Can you beat it?"

Ma said she could. "Because if I know anything about it he wasn't going near the pub. He was going home to a sandwich and a glass o' milk. Perhaps even water."

A moment later she turned to reach from a cupboard a new tin of salt and Pop, watching her upstretched figure as it revealed portions of enormous calves, suddenly felt a startling twinge of excitement in his veins. He immediately grasped Ma by the bosom and started squeezing her. Ma pretended to protest, giggling at the same time, but Pop continued to fondle her with immense, experienced enthusiasm, until finally she turned, yielded the great continent of her body to him, and let him kiss her full on her soft big mouth.

Pop prolonged this delicious experience as long as he had breath. He always felt more passionate in the kitchen. He supposed it was the smell of food. Ma sometimes told him it was

a wonder he ever got any meals at all and that he ought to know, at his age, which he wanted most, meals or her. "Both," he always said. "Often."

This morning, against the shining white stove, the glistening aluminium pans, and the background of sunlight on the young coppery-green leaves of the walnut tree, he thought she looked absolutely lovely. She was his dream.

He started to kiss her passionately again. But this time she held him away. The Brigadier, she said, would be wondering what was happening. "The twins'll be back with the ice-cream any moment too," she said. The twins had gone to the village, a quarter of a mile down the road, with orders to bring back the largest blocks of strawberry and chocolate mousse they could buy.

"Take the Brigadier a few crisps," Ma said. "They'll keep him going for half an hour." With reluctance Pop went back to the Brigadier, who sat staring into an empty glass, elbows on his knees, his trouser legs hitched up so that his socks and thin hairy shins were revealed. Pop saw now that the socks were odd, one yellow and one white, and that both had potatoes in the heels.

"Crisp, General?" he said and held out a big plastic orange dish of crisps, glistening fresh and salty . . .

Half an hour later two of the three geese were lying side by side, browned to perfection, deliciously varnished with running gravy, in a big oval blue meat dish on the table under the walnut tree. Other blue dishes stood about the table containing green peas and new potatoes veined with dark sprigs of mint, baked onions, asparagus, roast potatoes, Yorkshire pudding, and broad beans in parsley sauce. There were also big blue boats of apple sauce and gravy.

There had been times in his life when the Brigadier would have been prompted, out of sheer good form, social constraint, and various other preventive forces of upbringing, to describe the sight of all this as rather lacking in decency. Today he merely sat with restrained bewilderment, tortured by odours of goose-flesh and sage-and-onions, watching the faces of Pop, Ma, Mr. Charlton, and the entire Larkin brood while Pop carved with dextrous ease at the birds, themselves not at all unlike brown laden galleons floating in a glistening gravy sea.

Even the stiff prawns of his eyebrows made no quiver of surprise as Pop, flashing carving knife and steel in air, suggested that if Charley boy wanted to help he could pour the port out now.

Mr. Charlton put the port on the table in its champagne bucket, all beady with icy dew.

"Mix it," Pop said. "It makes a jolly good drink, red and white mixed together."

Mr. Charlton went round the table, pouring and mixing port. He had been introduced to the Brigadier by a more-than-usually facetious Pop as "A late entry—chap on the tax lark."

"Actually a real pukka tax-gatherer, you mean?" the Brigadier said, as if astonished that there could be such a person.

" Inspector's office," Mr. Charlton said.

" Tried to rope *me* in on that swindle yesterday," Pop said. He laughed derisively, in his customary ringing fashion.

The Brigadier confessed, with a certain sadness, that he paid no tax. At least, hardly any.

" And rightly so," Pop thundered.

Succulent pieces of bird were now being carved and dispatched about the table with breezy speed.

" That all right for you, General? " The Brigadier found himself facing an entire leg of goose and a large mound of sage-and-onions. " Start! " Pop ordered. " Don't let it get cold, General."

To the goose Mariette came to add peas, beans, Yorkshire pudding, and two sorts of potatoes, so that finally, when gravy and apple sauce had been ladled on, no single centimetre of naked plate could be seen.

A moment later the Brigadier, faced with superior forces and not knowing where to attack, saw Ma, like some huge yellow and scarlet butterfly glowing in the walnut shade, come up on his flank, bearing a deep dish of fat and buttery asparagus. With dry humour he started to confess to being out-numbered, a problem that Ma at once solved by placing the dish between the Brigadier and the head of table, where she herself now sat down.

" We'll share, shall we, General? " she said. " Help yourself from the dish. Everybody else has had some."

It was some moments before the Brigadier, deeply touched and painfully strung up by the first delicious tortures of eating, could relax enough to remember formality and lift his glass to Ma.

" Mr. Charlton, I think we should raise a glass to our hostess."

" 'Ear, 'ear," Pop said. " Cheers to Ma."

The Brigadier bent upwards from the table, raising his glass to Ma. Mr. Charlton also half rose and raised his glass and at the same moment Victoria said, pointing to the Brigadier, " You got potatoes in your socks, I saw them."

" Now, now," Pop said. " Manners. Elbows! "

Victoria was silent.

" Pop's got 'em at a word," Ma said proudly. " And now eat your potatoes," she said to Victoria. " Never mind about the General's."

" This is most superb cooking," the Brigadier said. " Where did you learn to cook, Mrs. Larkin? "

" She learnt at The Three Cocks hotel at Fordington," Pop said. " That's where she learnt. I can tell you. And it's never been the same since she left there."

" I can only say The Cock's loss is your gain," the Brigadier said, a remark that Ma found so amusing that she started choking again, her mouth jammed by a piece of asparagus.

" Hit her, General! " Pop said. " Middle o' the back! "

The Brigadier was utterly startled by this sudden and unnatural order. He moved vaguely to action by putting down his knife and fork, but a second later Ma had recovered.

" All right, Ma? " Pop said. " Drink a drop o' wine."

Ma, sipping wine, said thanks, she was all right again.

" Ma's got a very small gullet," Pop explained to the Brigadier, " compared with the rest of her."

" Have you told the children about the Gymkhana, Larkin? " the Brigadier said.

" Went clean out of my head," Pop said.

Waving a dripping wing-bone, which he had been busily sucking for some moments past, he informed the entire table in proud, imperial tones, " Going to hold the Gymkhana in the medder, kids. *Here.*"

Before anyone could speak an excited Mariette was on her feet, running round the table to Pop, whom she began kissing with great fervour on the lips, hardly a degree less passionately than Pop, in the kitchen, had kissed Ma.

" Lovely, lovely man. Lovely, lovely Pop."

Mr. Charlton sat tremulous, completely shaken. A curious wave of emotion, at first hot, then cold, lapped entirely through him from the small of his back to his brain. Unaccountably he found himself both jealous, then afraid, of the unquenchable demonstration that had left Pop, laughing loudly, hugging Mariette in return. He was not used to unquenchable demonstrations.

" That's the loveliest, loveliest news. Don't you think so, Mr. Charlton? "

" You should really thank the General," Pop said. " His idea."

" Committee—"

The word had hardly broken from the lips of the Brigadier before Mariette was at his side, kissing him too. The Brigadier, looking formally delighted, began to wipe his mouth with his serviette, but whether to wipe away kiss or asparagus butter it was not possible to say. He was still dabbing his mouth when Mariette kissed Ma, who explained to the Brigadier, " Mad on horses, General. Absolutely stark raving mad on horses," and then came round the table to where Mr. Charlton sat concentrating with every rigid nerve on scraping the last tissues of goose-flesh from a leg-bone.

Mr. Charlton was all mixed up. He was fighting to concentrate. He was fighting to disentangle one thought, one fear, from another. There had crossed his mind, for no sensible reason at all, the uneasy notion that the goose he was now eating might well be part of the same living bird that had so sinuously, shimmeringly wrapped its neck about his legs the previous day, with the shattering sensation of their being caressed by silk stockings. It was the most disturbing thought of his life and he knew that he was blushing. He knew he was afraid.

" Oh, Mr. Charlton, I'm so happy, I think I'll kiss you too! "

Mariette, to the unconcealed delight and satisfaction of Ma and Pop, bent and kissed Mr. Charlton briefly, but with purpose, full on the lips. Mr. Charlton recoiled in a crimson cloud, hearing about him trumpets of disaster. Everyone was laughing.

When he came to himself he knew he could never forget that moment. He was trembling all over. It was impossible to describe what the full soft lips of Mariette had felt like against his own except that it was, perhaps, like having them brushed by the skin of a warm firm plum, in full ripeness, for the first time.

While Mr. Charlton was still blushing Pop retired to the kitchen and fetched another goose. He began to carve for the Brigadier several thin extra-succulent slices of the breast. This one, he started saying, as he slid the knife across the crackling dark golden skin, was the tenderest of them all, and a moment later confirmed Mr. Charlton's worst fears by laughing uproariously. "This must be the joker that was under the table yesterday and heard us talking. Eh, Ma? Think o' that."

"Knowing birds," Ma said and turned to the Brigadier to ask, "What was it you was going to say, General, about the Committee?"

"Oh! merely that I was elected to be spokesman. To ask your husband—"

"Who's on the Committee?" Ma said.

"Well, Edith is secretary. Edith Pilchester. I expect she'll be coming to see you."

"Oh, I love old Edith," Pop said. "Edith's a sport."

"You be careful she don't love you," Ma said. "I wouldn't put anything past her."

"Ah, perfickly harmless," Pop said.

"Splendid organizer," the Brigadier said.

"That's what she thinks. She fancies she could organize a stallion into having pups," Ma said, "but that's where she's wrong," and once again, as she did so often at her own jokes, laughed with jellified splendour.

"Then there's Mrs. Peele and George Carter." the Brigadier said.

"Still living together, I suppose?" Ma said.

"I understand the arrangement still holds."

"Disgusting."

Ma made noises as she sucked a final piece of asparagus. Pop belched with sudden richness and said, "Manners." It was terrible the way people carried on, Ma said, and Pop agreed.

"Then there's Mrs. Borden."

Ma, eating the last of her peas with a tablespoon, made more noises of disgust and asked if Mrs. Borden was still keeping as sober as ever. Supposed she was?

"With the same fish-like capacity, I understand," the Brigadier said.

"Terrible," Ma said. "Shocking. Terrible state of affairs when you let drink get you down like that."

"Disgustin'," Pop said. "Disgustin'."

It was time for ice-cream. Mariette rose to fetch it from the kitchen, together with the jug of real Jersey, hoping that Mr. Charlton would seize so good an opportunity and come with her,

but Mr. Charlton was still all mixed up. The day had grown exceptionally humid and warm, the air thick with the stirring breath of growing leaves and grasses. Mariette felt the sweetness of it tingling madly in her nostrils and remembered the kiss she had given Mr. Charlton. She was sorry for Mr. Charlton. Making love might ease his mind.

In the meadow beyond the house she had noticed how high the buttercups were growing, thick and sappy and golden among the grasses' feathery flower, and she wondered what it would be like to make love to Mr. Charlton in a buttercup field. She thought she could but try. She was growing fonder and fonder of Mr. Charlton. His eyes were soft, endearing, and sometimes even sad, and she found herself fascinated by their brown, delicate, paintbrush lashes.

"Cuppa tea, General?"

After the ice-cream Ma was sitting back with a great air of content, as if really getting ready to enjoy herself.

"No, no, no. No really, thank you."

"No trouble. Always have one after dinner."

Mariette went away to the house to make tea, hoping again that Mr. Charlton would go with her, but Mr. Charlton was still battling for courage and concentration. Ma hoped so too and made pointed remarks about the heaviness of cups and trays. Mr. Charlton, soporific as well as fearful, made no hint of a move and Ma gave it all up, at last, in disgust. He just didn't know his technique, that was all.

When Mariette came across the garden with the tea, the Brigadier was moved to admiration of the dark, delicious little figure advancing with shapely provocation under the pure hot light of early afternoon. "Remarkably pretty she looks," he told Ma, who agreed with surprisingly energetic warmth.

Everybody except the Brigadier had tea, which Mariette poured out thick and strong, with cream. Pop stirred into his own cup two teaspoonfuls of port. It was still icy. "Helps to cool it down," he explained. "Ma can't do with it in the saucer."

An afternoon of delicious golden content folded its transparent envelope more and more softly about the paradisaical Larkin world, over the outlying meadow scintillating with its million buttercups and the shady fragrant walnut tree. Pop sighed and remarked how perfick it was. If only the Gymkhana was as perfick it would be marvellous, he said.

Should they have fireworks? "Tell the Committee I'll provide the fireworks," he said to the Brigadier. "That'll make it go with a bang."

The Brigadier, who did not answer, was almost asleep. The twins and the younger children had already slipped away. Ma was falling slowly asleep too, her head falling sideways, so that she was now less like a bright expansive butterfly than a vast yellow parrot tucking its head under its sleepy wing.

"Look at that sky, Charley," Pop said and indicated with the tip of an unlighted cigar the exquisite expanse of all heaven, blue

as flax-flower. "There's summat worth while for you. Perfick. Blimey, I wonder how you fellers can work in offices."

Mr. Charlton was beginning to wonder too.

"Cigar?" Mr. Charlton declined the cigar with low thanks.

"Ought to have give the General one," Pop said. The Brigadier was now fast asleep. Bad manners to have forgot the General, he thought. He liked the General. The old sport might not live very grand but he was unmistakably a gent. Not like George Carter and that crowd. They didn't think much of people like him and Ma. That's why they'd sent the General along as spokesman. He knew.

"Put the cigar on the General's plate, Charley," he said to Mr. Charlton, "when you get round to going."

"I think we're going now," Mariette said to Mr. Charlton, "aren't we?" Mr. Charlton, who had been in a mix-up all afternoon, abruptly fumbled to his feet, expressing agreement by taking the cigar and laying it beside the Brigadier's head, reclining now in flushed oblivion on the table.

"Going on the boat?" Pop said.

"Might do," Mariette said. "Might not get that far."

"Perfick anyway," Pop said, "wherever you go."

As they crossed from the garden to the big meadow beyond, Mariette took Mr. Charlton's hand. In the startled fashion of a young colt he almost jumped as she touched him. A wave of fragrance blew on the lightest breath of wind from the direction of the river, driving into her quickening nostrils odours of hawthorn bloom, clover, an entire valley of rising grasses, and distant invisible fields of early May.

It was so exquisitely strong that suddenly she bent down, took off her shoes, and started running.

A moment later Mr. Charlton, running too, realized how pretty, how exciting, her naked feet were.

That evening Pop, after a half-hour of twilight spent with Ma in the bluebell wood listening to a whole orchestra of nightingales, came back to the house to urge on Mr. Charlton the virtues of a little sick leave.

"Ma and me don't think you look all that grand," he said.

Pop went on to urge Mr. Charlton to use his loaf and take proper advantage of what he called "the National 'Elf lark," a service which, after all, Mr. Charlton paid for. Pop was certain Mr. Charlton had already paid out millions to this swindle in weekly contributions. It must have cost him a fortune in stamps. With warmth he urged Mr. Charlton not to be a mug about it. It was, after all, the State that had started this lark—why not go sick, he urged, and have a bit of fun?

Mr. Charlton might have resisted these arguments if it hadn't been that, just before midnight, Mariette pinned him up against the newel post by the dark stairs, kissed him again, and said his hands were hot. Hot hands were a bad sign.

Mr. Charlton tried to protest that his hands were invariably hot, especially at that time of year, but Mariette kissed him again, pressing her warm plum-like mouth for a long time against his lips, leaving him in another terrible turmoil of divided emotions about the buttercup field, the nightingales, and the affair of the goose-neck entwining his leg.

"You could stay a week, lovey," she said. She had begun to call him lovey in the buttercup field. "And then all next weekend."

Mr. Charlton tried to explain that he had a vast and frightful number of papers on his desk at the office that had to be attended to and how there would be an awful stink if he didn't get back.

"Think if you broke your leg," she said.

Mr. Charlton said he didn't want to think of breaking his leg. He was talking about loyalty, duty, pangs of conscience, and that sort of thing.

"Sounds silly," Mariette said and Mr. Charlton, trembling on the dark stairs, under the influence of the pressing, plum-like lips, was bound to admit that it did.

The result was that he got up next morning to a massive breakfast of two fried eggs, several slices of liver and bacon, much fried bread, and enormous cups of black sugary tea.

Pop was already breakfasting when he arrived at table. Poised heartily above a sea of tomato ketchup, under which whatever he was having for breakfast was completely submerged, he praised for some moments the utter beauty of the first young strawberry morning. It was going to be a perfick day, he said. The cuckoo had been calling since four o'clock.

The only thing that troubled Mr. Charlton as he ate his breakfast was that he felt there was absolutely nothing wrong with him. He could honestly complain of neither sickness nor exhaustion. He had never felt better. "I don't know what to tell the office," he said. "Honestly there's nothing wrong with me."

"Then you must make summat up," Pop said, "mustn't you? Like lumbago." Mr. Charlton protested that he had never had lumbago in his life, and was not likely to have.

"Oh yes, you are," Pop said and laughed in hearty, ringing fashion. "You'll have it chronic tonight. After the first day in the strawberry field."

At eight o'clock Mr. Charlton found himself sitting in the back of the gentian-blue, home-painted truck, together with Mariette, the twins, Montgomery, Victoria, and Primrose. Ma and Pop sat in the cab in front and Ma, who was in great spirits and was dressed in enormous khaki denim slacks with an overall top, laughed and said it was a pity they couldn't all go in the Rolls, just to shake everybody.

Mariette was in slacks too, bright salvia-red ones, with a soft blue shirt and a spotted red-and-white kerchief over her hair. Over the khaki overalls Ma was wearing the salmon jumper, just because the ride might be cool in the morning air, and a great pudding-bag of an orange scarf on her head.

"Everybody all right in the back there?" Pop yelled and got his customary handsome ribbon of voices in answer.

The truck had hardly rolled out of the yard before everyone began singing. It was Pop who started the song, which was *We ain't got a barrel o' money*, and everyone took it up in shrill voices. Mr. Charlton was embarrassed. He had never ridden in the back of a truck before. Still less had he ever sung in a truck on a public highway. He wondered what on earth would happen if he was seen by someone who knew him, someone perhaps from the office. It would be terrible to be seen by any of the chaps.

Half a mile down the road the truck drew up with a sharp whistle of brakes and everyone stopped singing and started shrieking loudly instead. Mr. Charlton looked over the sideboard of the truck to see what the trouble was and saw Pop in the road, lifting up in his arms the tiniest woman Mr. Charlton had, outside a circus, ever seen. "Room for a little un?" Pop said and threw the little lady up into the truck. She shrieked like a laughing doll as she landed between the twins and Mr. Charlton.

"That Little Two-penn'orth," Pop explained, "is Aunt Fan."

Aunt Fan to whom? Mr. Charlton wondered but never discovered. His immediate impression was that The Little Two-penn'orth had a face like a small brown shellfish of the winkle sort. It was all round and crinkled and twisted up. She too was wearing slacks, tiny dark maroon-red ones, and a man's grey tweed cap on her head, fixed there by two large pearl hatpins. Her ginger-brown eyes shone like shoe-buttons and her chest was flat.

"Everybody all right in the truck there? Hang on, Aunt Fan!"

Once again everybody, including The Little Two-penn'orth, started singing. By this time the sun was well above the miles of surrounding orchards, chestnut copses, and fields of rising oats and barley, and as it shone down on the truck and on the laughing, singing faces, Mr. Charlton saw a tiny creature popping in and out of Aunt Fan's mouth, exactly like a pink mollusc emerging from its shell. This was The Little Two-penn'orth's tongue and it helped to work the shrillest voice he had ever heard. It was a voice like a wild train whistle shrieking on a far mountain top.

"Don't you sing, mister?" she said.

Mr. Charlton, grinning feebly, did not know what to say. His hair was flying about in all directions. The truck was wildly bumping over a hard clay track, jolting Aunt Fan and the children to new laughter. Mr. Charlton did sing. He flattered himself, excusably, that he sang rather well. His voice, belying his bony, very average physique, was a deep soft baritone. But now his mouth and throat felt like pumice-stone and he was not sure, with the wild bouncing of the truck, quite where his breakfast was.

To his great relief the truck came to a halt, two minutes later, between a copse of tall chestnut saplings and a big open strawberry field. A sudden sensation of dizziness found Mr. Charlton unready as he jumped from the truck. He groped at the air and was suddenly and immensely surprised to see The Little Two-penn'orth

flying down from the back of the truck, straight into his arms.

He clasped at the toy-like body instinctively, as at a ball. The Little Two-penn'orth landed straight on his chest, winding him temporarily. Everyone began laughing and The Little Two-penn'orth shrieked with delight.

Mr. Charlton did his best to focus the shimmering strawberry field. He was now convinced that a terrible day lay in front of him. The sun was clear and hot under the shelter of the barrier of woodland; by noon it would be blistering down. Yesterday had been the hottest thirtieth of May, so the papers all said, for forty years. Today would be even hotter.

"You can eat all the strawberries you like," Mariette said. "But you'll soon get tired of that."

Mr. Charlton did not feel at all like eating strawberries. He longed to be able to sit down—if possible, to lie down—in some cool quiet place under the chestnut saplings.

"Keep near me," Mariette said, and gave him a dark low stare which he was too sick to appreciate or return.

He followed her, the rest of the family, and The Little Two-penn'orth into the strawberry field. Already, along the yellow alleys of straw, twenty or thirty girls and women, with an odd man or two, were picking. Flag-wise a strange assortment of shirts and blouses, yellow and red and green and brown and even violet, was strung about the field. A green canvas tent, towards which Mr. Charlton looked with pitiful desperation as at an oasis, stood in the centre of the field, piled about with fresh white chip baskets.

Bending down, Mr. Charlton started to pick strawberries, deciding at the same time that he would never again eat pig's liver and bacon for breakfast. The hot summery distances were full of calling cuckoos. The field trembled like a zither with chattering women's voices. A man decided to strip his shirt off and the sudden sight of his pure naked torso set every female voice laughing, cat-calling, or simply whistling in admiring wonder.

"Why don't you do that, lovey?" Mariette said. "You'd be all that much cooler. In time you'd get marvellously brown."

"I think I'll just try and get acclimatized first," Mr. Charlton said. The process of getting acclimatized took him through a sickening forty minutes of sweat. His spectacles misted over. The Little Two-penn'orth's voice, piercing as a drill, cut the hot air about him, as it seemed, every several seconds. Broad belts of Ma's quivering laughter slapped across the field.

Lying on their fresh beds of straw, the squarish fat crimson strawberries shone in the sun with a too-perfect beauty: exactly as Pop said, as if painted, and now and then Mr. Charlton looked up to see the lips of Mariette parted half in laughter, half in the act of biting into some glistening arc of lovely dark ripe flesh.

"Heavens, I'm getting hungry," she told him several times. "I hope Ma brought the rest of the cold roast goose for dinner."

He was very slow, he presently discovered, at the picking.

Mariette could fill, with swift deft ease, three punnet baskets to his one.

"You're not very fast, are you?" she said. "Don't you feel very well?" Mr. Charlton confessed with a small wry smile that he was not quite a top note.

"I thought as much," she said. "It's just what we were telling you yesterday. You need some sick leave. Come on—let's go along to the tent and get the baskets weighed. You have to get them weighed and checked there."

It turned out that this, the tent, was Mr. Charlton's salvation. Pop, who was also at the tent getting his first baskets checked, introduced him to the foreman, a youngish energetic man in khaki shirt and slacks, as "Charley boy. Friend of ours, Mr. Jennings. Office feller from the tax-lark."

Mr. Jennings appraised Mr. Charlton, of the tax-lark, with interested swiftness. You didn't often get office fellers in the strawberry field.

"Chap I'm looking for," he told Mr. Charlton. "What about sitting here and doing my job? All you do is weigh and book the baskets. How about it? I got a million things to do besides sit here and check these ruddy women."

"There y'are, Charley boy," Pop said, clapping him on the shoulder and laughing in ringing fashion. "Got you promoted already." Mr. Charlton felt intensely relieved. To his astonishment Pop shook his hand. "Well, got to run along now, Charley boy. Got to see a man about some scrap iron. Don't do anything I wouldn't do. See you all about five."

Pop departed across the field to the truck and Mr. Charlton, sitting down at the table in the green shade of the tent, at once felt much more himself. It was almost like being back in the office.

"It's pretty simple," Mr. Jennings said, and went on to explain what he said was the easy, straightforward procedure of checking, weighing, and recording the baskets. Mr. Charlton thought it was simple too. "Nothing to it," Mr. Jennings said. "You just got to keep a record in the book here, with the names, that's all, so we can pay out at the end of the day."

Mr. Jennings departed after saying that he'd come back in an hour or so to see how Mr. Charlton was getting on, though he didn't think, on the whole, he'd have any trouble at all. "One or two of the old faggots might try a bit of cheek on you," he said, "but if they do, be firm. Don't let 'em spit in your eye."

Mr. Charlton said he thought he had it taped all right and sat back and cleaned his glasses and combed his hair. Across the field he could see all kinds of women, fat ones, scrawny ones, pretty ones, old ones, very young ones, together with children, bending and laughing in the long strawberry rows, their blouses and slacks stringing out flag-wise, in brilliant colours, under a hot cloudless sky. It was a very pleasant, peaceful, pastoral scene, he thought, and there was a delicious fragrance of ripe strawberries.

"Forgotten me?"

He was startled. He had utterly forgotten Mariette, who had been standing behind him all the time.

"Afraid I had. So absorbed in the new job and all that—"

"Well, don't," she said, "or I'll be miserable." She kissed him lightly on the cheek. "Feeling better now?"

"Absolutely all right."

"You see, I told you," she said. "All you want is rest and fresh air and good food and you'll be as right as rain."

She stood at the door of the tent, so prettily framed against the clear sky beyond that Mr. Charlton wished he were back with her in the buttercup field.

"See you soon," she said. "And mind what you're up to. Don't get mixed up with other women."

Mr. Charlton, who had no intention whatever of getting mixed up with other women, started to apply himself earnestly to the task of checking and weighing the baskets of fruit as they came in. It seemed that he got on very well for a time. All the women seemed very polite and some actually called him "duckie." They spelt their names out carefully when he wasn't quite sure of them. They said how hot it was and one of them, a big sloppy woman named Poll Sanders, with gold-filled teeth and small gold earrings, laughed in a voice like a street-trader selling mackerel and said, "Sweat—I can feel it running down my back. Goes on like this we'll have to strip out again—like we did that 'ot year afore. Remember that, Lil?"

Lil remembered. "And that wasn't as 'ot as this though." Lil was tall, yellow, and hollow-faced. She too had small gold earrings. She was much thinner than Poll but this made no difference. She sweated as much as Poll did.

Mr. Charlton wrote in the book that Poll Sanders had brought in two dozen baskets and then, looking up, saw that Lil had gone. He realized suddenly that he had forgotten exactly how many baskets Lil had brought in. He dropped his rubber-tipped pencil on the table and ran after her, catching her up twenty yards across the field. He said he was frightfully sorry but he had forgotten the number of her baskets.

She gave him a look as hard as flint and her mouth opened and shut like a spring trap. "Two dozen," she said.

"That's what I thought," he said, and she gave him another look, harder than the first, and he left it at that.

"You want to get your arithmetic working," she said.

His arithmetic wasn't working very well with Poll Sanders either. When he got back to the tent and sat down to write Lil's figures he discovered he had pencilled down three for Poll Sanders instead of two. Poll had disappeared.

He was so sure the figure was two that he ran after her too.

"Three," she said.

She gave him that same flat, unflinching look he had seen on the face of Lil. "I was standing there when you writ it down, wasn't I? Use your loaf, man."

YOUR PEN CAN PAY FOR YOUR HOLIDAY

Wherever you take your holiday this year, your pen can pay the cost—and more! With travel becoming easier, more and more papers and magazines are interested in articles and stories with a holiday flavour. The mind when in fresh surroundings develops an alertness and stores up material which the trained writer can always use.

Nearly forty years ago the LSJ was founded under the aegis of the press. It has helped to success many who would not have succeeded otherwise and its personal methods have won praise in all parts of the world. The courses are in Journalism, Story Writing, Free Lance Journalism, Television Plays, Radio Plays, Literature, History, Poetry and Writing for Children.

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"There are LSJ students all over the world."

He decided he'd better use his loaf as much as possible, but he was soon over-busy and it was very stifling in the little tent. He had to keep a sharper, keener eye on the figures as the women came in, bringing scores of baskets. Once The Little Two-penn'orth came in, bent double by two dozen baskets in boxes almost as large as herself, so that they hung from her little hands like overladen panniers from the sides of a tiny grey donkey. The entire Larkin family also came in, all of them eating potato crisps and big orange lollipops on sticks, except the twins, who were eating peanuts, strawberries, and bread and jam.

Ma offered Mr. Charlton an orange lollipop on a stick and seemed surprised, even pained, when he said no thanks, he didn't think so.

"You'll be glad of it," she said. "You ain't had nothing since breakfast." Mr. Charlton still had moments when he found it impossible to remember breakfast with anything but pain. "Anyway I'll leave it here on the table. You might be glad of it."

"Toodle-oo," the twins said, "if you don't want it we'll eat it next time we come," and ran after Ma, begging for ice-creams.

Mr. Charlton looked up, some time later, to see a pretty, fair-haired, well-made girl standing in the tent. She was wearing tight black jeans and an even tighter thin black woollen sweater. The outlines of her breasts under the sweater were as pronounced as if carved. The hair was tied up in a long shining horse-tail, the fluffy sun-whitened ends of it brushing her shoulders.

"Pauline Jackson," she said, "two dozen."

Her eyes were big and blue. Her very smooth skin was deep brown from working in the fields. Her forearms were covered with tender, downy, golden hairs. Her tongue played on her straight white teeth when she had finished speaking.

While Mr. Charlton was writing in the book she said, "New here, aren't you? Never seen you here before."

She had a slow, drowsy way of talking. It somehow matched the way her tongue remained playing on her lips and the way her hair fell on her shoulders.

"Mind if I ask you something?" she said.

"No," Mr. Charlton said. "What would that be?"

"Is your name Cedric? They all say your name's Cedric out there." The blush that ramped through Mr. Charlton's face and neck made every pore of his body break with sweat.

"Oh no!" he said. "Goodness, no. Who told you that one?"

"That's what they all say. I said there was no such name."

She was laughing at him, he thought, in her drowsy, large-eyed way. He fumbled about nervously with book, baskets, and papers and said, "Good lord, no. Charley. That's me."

She reached out a brown long-fingered hand and took a strawberry from a basket. She bit into it and then stood staring at the white-crimson juicy inner flesh. "Don't you like strawberries?"

"Ask the Larkins," he said. "Ask Mariette. They all call me Charley."

Careers in Electricity Supply

This is an extract from a recorded interview with Mr. Telford, who joined the Electricity Supply Industry as a Graduate Trainee.

"...you can have a go at whatever you want"

Mr Telford

Question Master. **What was your first job in Electricity Supply after your training was finished?**

Mr Telford: Well, I finished my graduate course in 1950 and was appointed Shift Charge Engineer at Frome, in Somerset — a small station but an excellent training ground. From there I went to Earley — a much bigger station of 120 megawatts — as Boiler House Shift Engineer; later I became Charge Engineer there, and for a while was Efficiency Engineer, as well.

Q.M.: **Your next step was London, wasn't it?**

Tel.. Yes, I came to London as Second Assistant Engineer on the Divisional Staff, and later I was appointed Deputy Superintendent at Bankside Generating Station — the position which I hold now.

Q.M.. **Bankside is a pretty big station, and at 36 you're young, aren't you, to be a Deputy Superintendent? But what made you come to London in the first place?**

Tel.. A chance came along to get some administrative experience at H.Q. level, and I thought I'd better take it.

Q.M.: **Does the Industry give many opportunities like that?**

Tel.: It most certainly does. It gives you a complete opportunity to have a go at whatever you want, and what you think you're best equipped for. The man who wants to get on is helped in every possible way, I've attended several courses run by the Industry, not only on technical matters, but on subjects like personnel selection and industrial relations.

Q.M.. **Now a word about newcomers to the industry. If you have a chap of ability who is prepared to get down to the task, what would you say his opportunities were like?**

Tel: I would say that he has really splendid opportunities. For one thing, a career in the industry is established on a very firm footing — you could do without a lot of things, but it's impossible to get on nowadays without electrical energy. Another point worth remembering is that a man coming into the industry has the choice of the entire country to work in, and there's no parochial approach.

We'd like to publish more of this interview but there isn't space. For details of the many careers in the Electricity Supply Industry and the salaried training schemes available, ask at your local Generating or Distribution Board's offices, or write direct to:

The Education and Training Officer,
The Electricity Council,
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"Oh, her! She knows you, does she?" She put the rest of the strawberry in her mouth and pulled out the clean, white plug.

"Last feller who was here did nothing but eat strawberries. Every time you came in here that feller was bolting strawberries."

Mr. Charlton, confused again, murmured something about having no time. Having something else to do.

"Such as what?"

Mr. Charlton didn't know.

She moved nearer the table to pick up another strawberry and then changed her mind and took up Ma's orange lollipop instead.

"Don't you like these either?"

"Not frightfully—"

"Don't like anything, do you?". She laughed, the voice drowsier than ever in her throat, the tongue drifting idly across her mouth. "Not much!"

A moment later she started twisting the lollipop round and round in her brown fingers. "Suppose you'd think I was greedy if I asked you whether I could have it?"

"Oh no, please," Mr. Charlton said. "Take it if you want to. By all means."

"Thanks." She laughed again, once more with that drowsy softness that made Mr. Charlton feel dreadfully congested, sweating, and messy, sure that she was mocking him. "That's the way to be nice to anybody. First time."

Unaware of it Mr. Charlton said an extremely foolish thing, "Aren't people always nice to you first time?"

"Depends."

Mr. Charlton, unaware of it again, said another foolish thing, "Depends on what?"

She turned sideways, so that for the second time in his life Mr. Charlton found himself confronted by an astral body of alarming shape, this time as firm and dark as ebony.

"On whether I let them."

She had already started to peel the paper from the orange lollipop when Mariette came in, carrying two baskets.

"Oh, company!" the girl said.

Peeling the last of the paper from the orange lollipop she stared with flat cool eyes at Mariette. Mr. Charlton thought Mariette's eyes looked, in reply, like two infuriated black bees.

"Well, I'll push off," the girl said. "See you later, Charley." She tossed her hair from one side of her shoulders to another, at the same time giving Mr. Charlton a glad, cool, backward look. "If not before."

She was hardly out of the tent before Mariette banged the two baskets on the table and shouted, "Tart!"

Mr. Charlton was very much shaken.

"Steady," he said. "She'll hear—"

"She's meant to, the so-and-so, isn't she?"

"I really didn't want the thing," Mr. Charlton said. "I told her to take it—"

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[NCT 101 J]

"She'd take anything. She'd take the skin off your back—and a bit more, if you let her!" He had never seen Mariette angry before. Her voice sounded raw.

"She's nothing but a—" Mariette choked at some impossible word and then decided Mr. Charlton wouldn't understand it. "She's no virgin," she shouted, "everybody knows that!"

Mr. Charlton, who was not accustomed to hear the word virgin bandied about very much, especially in public, was relieved to see two more women approaching the tent, but was disappointed a moment later to see that they were Poll and Lil. He had made up his mind to remonstrate tactfully with Poll about rubbing out and altering the figure in the book from two to three and thus twisting him. He was convinced that was what had happened.

But when he saw the two earringed women, one tall and scrawny as a scarecrow, the other brawny as a bare-armed fish-wife, both as brown as gypsies, he suddenly lost heart and said to Mariette, "Don't go for a minute. Stay until these two have gone. I want to talk to you—"

"I've got to cool off," Mariette said. "I'm going into the wood to cool off."

"Wait just a minute—"

"I've got to cool off. That's where I'll be if you want me."

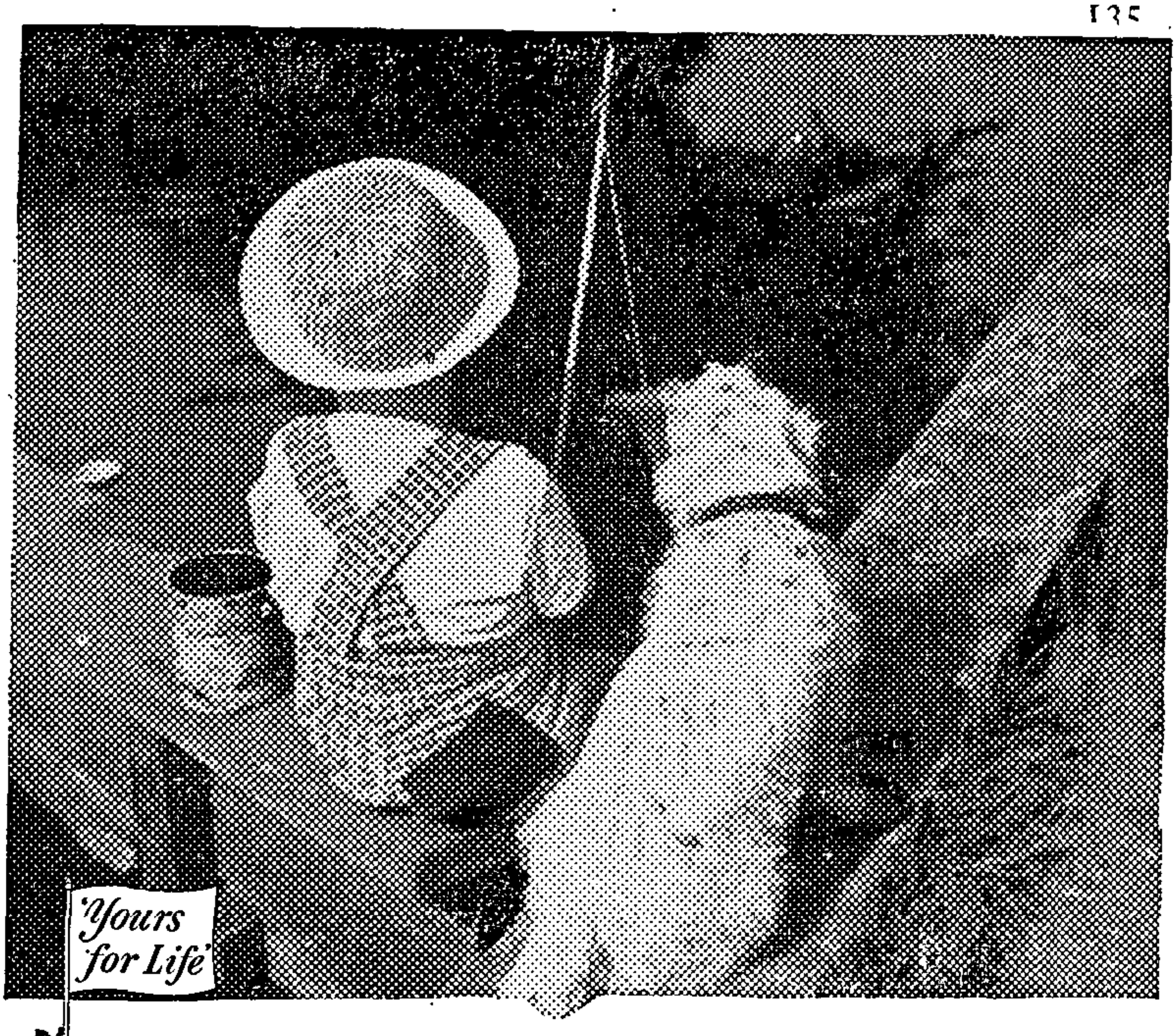
A moment later he was alone with Poll and Lil, who had been having a conference as to whether they could twist him a second time so soon or whether they should leave it for a while and do a double twist next time.

"Hullo, duckie," they said. "Here we are again."

By the middle of the afternoon it was so hot that Mr. Charlton got Montgomery and the twins to bring him a bucket of water drawn from a standpipe by the gate of the field. He drank a big draught or two of water and then plunged his head several times into the bucket, dried his face on his handkerchief, and combed his wet, cooled hair. After this he cleaned up his spectacles, polishing them on the driest piece of his shirt he could find, and went to stand at the door of the tent, slightly refreshed, to get a breath of air. The sun hit the crown of his head like a brass cymbal. He had never known it so hot in May. It seemed to affect his eyesight for a moment and when he looked across the strawberry field he was astonished to see a startling change there.

Almost all the women had done what Poll and Lil had said they would do. They had stripped off their blouses and shirts in the heat and were working in nothing but bodices and brassières. The effect was that the lines of coloured flags had now become like lines of white washing hung out in the blazing sun to dry.

Mr. Charlton went back into the tent and tried to satisfy his curiosity about what Pop called the strawberry lark by adding up how many pounds of strawberries had been in and out of the tent that day. He calculated, astonishingly, that he had checked in more than a ton. That meant, he reasoned, a pretty fair lump



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for the pickers. His trained mind wondered what the tax position about *that* was. He would have to ask Pop. He was sure Pop would know.

He was still thinking of this when he looked up and saw Pauline Jackson standing in the door. She was not wearing a black sweater now. Like the rest of the women she had stripped down to her brassière. She had very fine sun-tanned arms and shoulders but the lower part of her deep chest was as white as the inside of a young apple by comparison. It was this startling whiteness that made his heart start bouncing. She smiled. She came to the table and said in her lazy way, "Not much cooler, is it?"

She put twenty-four pounds of strawberries on the table. He started to fumble with pencil and paper, his eyes downcast. She leaned forward as if to see what he was writing down and said, "How many does that make for me today? Eight dozen?"

He started to say, "I've got an idea it's more than that, Miss Jackson," determined to keep it as formal as possible, and then looked up to see, not ten or twelve inches from his face, most of her bared, white, perfectly sculptured bust, blazingly revealed, heaving deeply.

Like Ma, Miss Jackson did not seem unduly perturbed.

"Two more dozen," she said, "and I think I'll pack it up for the day."

"I see. Are you paid every day, Miss Jackson, or do you leave it till the weekend?"

"What makes you keep calling me Miss Jackson?"

He started to write in the book again when she said, "What time are you knocking off? Going back to Fordington? If you are I could give you a lift on my scooter."

Where on earth did these people get the money from? Mr. Charlton started thinking. He supposed—

"What about it?" she said.

Too nervous to think clearly, Mr. Charlton said, "I don't know what time I'll finish. I did want to go to Fordington to fetch some clothes from my room, but—"

"Might go on and have a swim at the Pool," she said, "afterwards. How about that?"

He said, "Well—"

"I could wait." The sculptured breasts rose and fell heavily and came an inch or two nearer, their division so deep and the pure whiteness so sharp in the shade of the tent, against the dark brown upper flesh of her shoulders, that Mr. Charlton was utterly mesmerized. "No hurry for half an hour one way or the other. Just tell me when."

She swung her body away. He saw the splendid curves turn full circle in such a way that he was dizzy in the heat. She laughed and reached the door as he stuttered, "You know, I actually couldn't say if—I mean, there's nothing definite—"

"Just say when," she said. "All you got to do is to tell me when."

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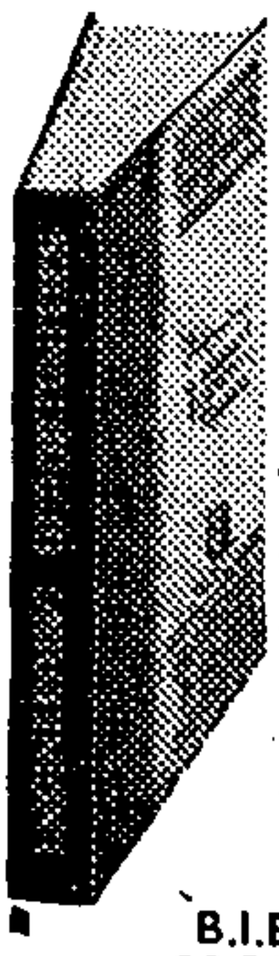

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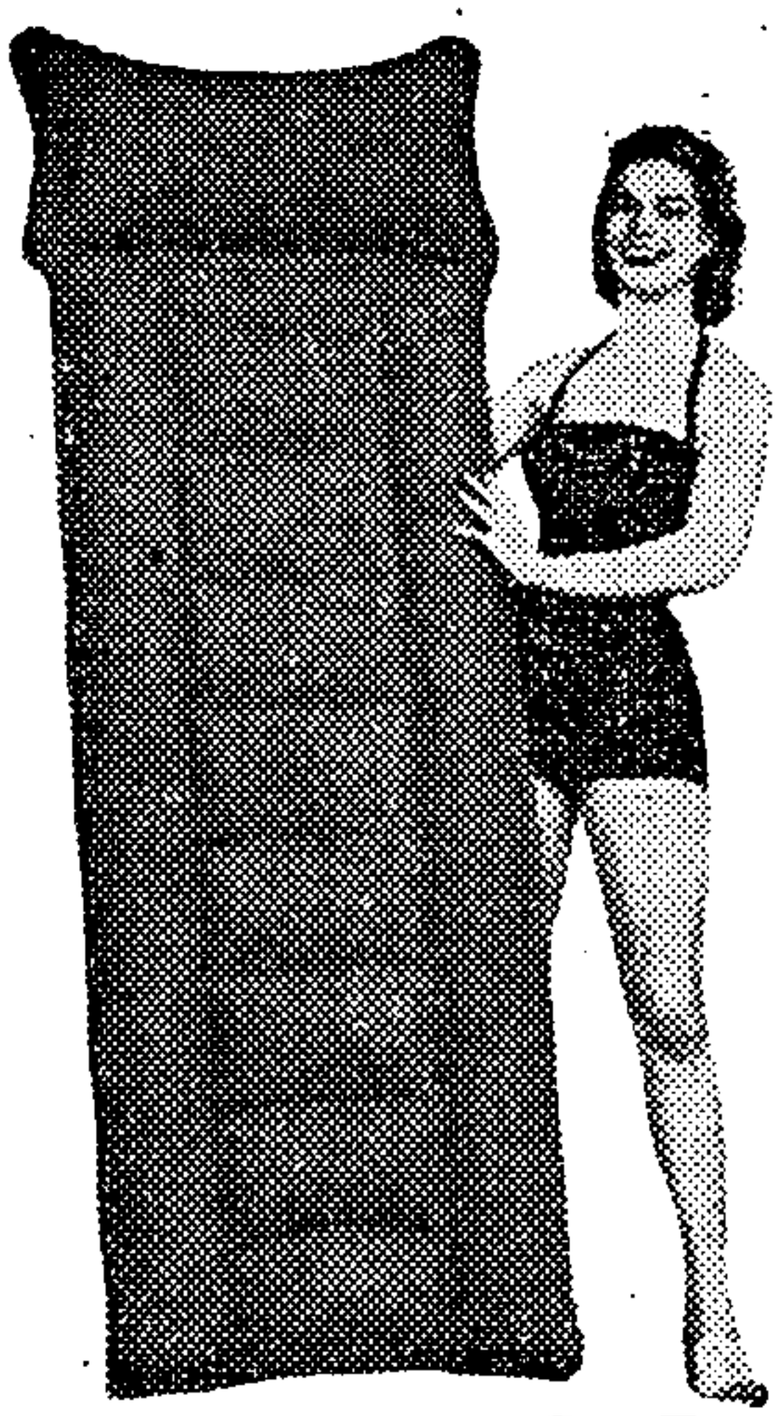

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She had hardly disappeared before Poll and Lil came in. They too had stripped down to the bust and Poll had an unlighted cigarette dangling from her lips. They had decided to work a new one on Mr. Charlton. "Hullo, duckie," they said and Poll took the cigarette from her lips, broke it in half, and gave one half to Lil. "Last one, dear. Not unless Charley can help us out. Haven't got a gasper, duckie, I suppose?"

Mr. Charlton, who smoked moderately at the best of times, had recently given it up altogether. "Afraid not. Don't smoke now—"

"Came out without a bean this morning," Poll explained. "Too early for the damn post office. Else we'd have got the kids' allowances."

"How many baskets?" Mr. Charlton said.

"Three dozen." Poll lit her cigarette and then gave Lil a light, both of them exhaling smoke in desperate relief. "Gawd, it's hot out in that field. Don't suppose you could lend us five bob so's Lil can nip down to the shop on her bike, can you? Pay you back first thing tomorrow."

Mr. Charlton wrote desperately in the book while the two bare-chested women watched him, though he did not know it, like two brown, hungry, calculating old dogs watching a bone. There probably wasn't much meat on Mr. Charlton; they'd better get it off while they could. "Five bob, duckie. Gawd, it's hot out in that field. Two women fainted. Did you hear about that, duckie? Two women fainted."

"Work it orf as dead horse," Lil started to say.

Touched, nervous, and swayed against his better judgment, Mr. Charlton was just thinking of lending Poll and Lil the five bob to be worked off as dead horse when he heard, from the field, a sudden pandemonium of yelling and shrieking.

He followed Poll and Lil to the door of the tent. Thirty yards from the tent a ring of semi-naked vultures were shrieking and flapping in the sun. "Somebody's at it. Somebody's catching a packet," Poll said and Mr. Charlton caught a glimpse, somewhere in the vultured circle, of two bare-shouldered girls fighting each other, like wild white cats.

Poll and Lil started running. Mr. Charlton started running too. Then, after ten yards or so, he suddenly stopped as if his head had been caught by an invisible trip-wire.

One of the white cats was Pauline Jackson; the other was Mariette. Like cats too they were howling in the unrestricted animal voices that belong to dark roof tops. With alarm Mr. Charlton saw streams of blood on the flesh of hands, faces, bare shoulders, and half-bare breasts and then suddenly realized that this was really the scarlet juice of smashed strawberries which the girls were viciously rubbing into each other's eyes and throat and hair. The fair horse-tail was like frayed red rope and the neat dark curls of Mariette that he cared for more and more every time he saw them were being torn from her face. Somewhere

in the centre of it all the colossal bulk of Ma was shouting.

Half a minute later he heard the highest shrieking of all. It came from behind him. He turned sharply and saw The Little Two-penn'orth running from the shelter of the wood, waving her tiny arms in excitement. That high-pitched voice of hers was more like a train whistle than ever.

When she reached him she started bobbing wildly up and down, like a child too small to see over a fence, and Mr. Charlton realized that she could not see any part of the cat-and-strawberry horror that by now had him completely spellbound.

"Hold me up, mister!" she shrieked. "I s'll miss it!"

He took her by the arms and the tiny body rose into the air like a spring. "Blimey, it's good!" she shrieked.

By now she was actually sitting on Mr. Charlton's shoulder, her tiny short legs drumming continually on his chest and her fists in his hair. "That'll take some getting out in the wash. Git stuck into her, Mariette! It's good! It's good! It's good!"

Mr. Charlton didn't think it was good. He was afraid Mariette would get seriously hurt and he felt a little sick at the thought of it. Suddenly he felt constrained to rush in and separate the two combatants, all scarlet now and weeping and half naked, before they disfigured each other for ever; and he said, "I've got to stop them. I've got to make them stop it. Anyway, what on earth are they fighting *for*?"

"Gor blimey, don't you know, mister?" The Little Two-penn'orth shrieked. "Don't tell me you don't *know*!"

Even when he was riding home that evening in the back of the truck Mr. Charlton still could not really believe that he knew. The notion that two girls would fight for him still had him completely stunned.

Everybody had been sternly briefed by Ma, before the truck arrived, not to say a word to Pop. Everybody agreed; they were all for Mariette.

Mr. Charlton was all for Mariette too; he felt himself grow continually more proud of her as the truck, driven at Pop's customary jolting speed, rocked homewards through fragrant hedgerows of honeysuckle, the first wild pink roses, and may. He kept smiling at her and watching her dark, pretty, red-stained hair. Somebody had lent her a green sweater to wear over her ripped bodice and you could hardly tell, now, that she had been in a fight at all. In a curious way it was Mr. Charlton who felt he had been in a fight. A total lack of all feeling of uncertainty, together with an odd sensation of actual aggression, began to make him feel rather proud of himself too.

"Well, how was the first day, Charley?" Pop said. In the sitting-room Pop had poured out a Dragon's Blood for himself and one for Mr. Charlton, who felt he really needed it. He was as hungry as a hunter too.

"How was the first day? Everything go orf all right? Smooth an' all that? No lumbago?"

"No lumbago," Mr. Charlton said. "Everything smooth as it could be."

"Perfick," Pop said. He drank Dragon's Blood to the day's perfection and called through to the kitchen to Ma, "How long'll supper be, Ma? I'm turning over."

"About an hour yet. Roast beef's only just gone in."

"How'd you get on today, Ma? Good picking?"

"Earned fourteen pound ten," Ma said.

"Hour yet," Pop said to Mr. Charlton, "plenty o' time for you to take Mariette for a stroll as far as the river. They'll be cutting the grass in that medder tomorrow."

Mr. Charlton agreed; he had had his thoughts very much in the buttercup field.

Just before going outside, however, he remembered that he had a question to ask of Pop. It was the one about tax on the strawberry lark. "An awful lot of money gets paid out to these people," he said. "Strawberries. Cherries. Hops and so on. Take for example all these Cockneys coming down for the hops. Strictly, in law they ought to pay tax on that."

"Pay tax?" Pop said. He spoke faintly.

"I mean if the law is to be interpreted in the strict letter—"

"Strick letter, my aunt Fanny," Pop said. "Dammit, if they was taxed they wouldn't come. Then you wouldn't have no strawberries, no cherries, no nuthink. No beer!"

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The logic of this argument dashed the last of Mr. Charlton's reasoning and he went away to find Mariette, who was just coming downstairs, dressed now in the cool green shantung of which he had grown so very fond.

As Mr. Charlton and Mariette disappeared across the yard in the evening sun, Ma's only complaint, as she watched them from the kitchen window, was that she hadn't got a pair of field-glasses, so that she could watch " how that young man's getting on with his technique. If he's getting on at all."

Pop, after pouring two gills of gin into his second Dragon's Blood in order to pep it up a bit, retired to watch television. It had been on for some considerable time, out of natural habit, though no one was watching it, and now there was a programme on the screen about life in central Africa, about wild animals, pygmies. and their strange, baffling customs.

Pop sat back happily in the greenish unreal semi-darkness. He had had a very good day doing a big lark in scrap that showed six hundred per cent with not a very great deal of trouble. He would tell Ma all about it later.

Meanwhile he was perfectly content to sit and sip his beer and watch the pygmies, all of whom hopped about the jungle and the village compounds with unconcern, without a stitch on, all the women bare-breasted. There was hardly a programme he liked better than these about strange hot countries, wild animals, and queer tribes, especially these who had never seen civilization . . .

Out in the buttercup field Mariette and Mr. Charlton were lying in the tall brilliant flowers and the even taller, feathery grasses.

Mariette, so dark and so pretty in her green shantung, was drawing Mr. Charlton very gently to her and Mr. Charlton was responding with a proud, searching look on his face.

Ma, if she could have been watching him at that moment, would have been satisfied that he had gone some way in certain directions towards improving his technique © H. E. Bates 1958

★ ***In the last part of The Darling Buds of May, by H. E. Bates, Mr. Charlton continues to play truant from the tax office and reaches the apex of his exciting visit——in next month's Argosy on sale June 10***

SOLUTION to ARGOSY CROSSWORD on page 144

Across. 1, *Market gardens.* 10, *Envious.* 11, *Mulatto.* 12, *Test.* 13, *Taunt.* 14, *Prod.* 17, *Elderly.* 18, *Angelus.* 19, *Jackdaw.* 22, *Salvage.* 24, *Crab.* 25, *Snout.* 26, *Aged* 29. *Entreat.* 30 *Askelon.* 31, *In the presence*

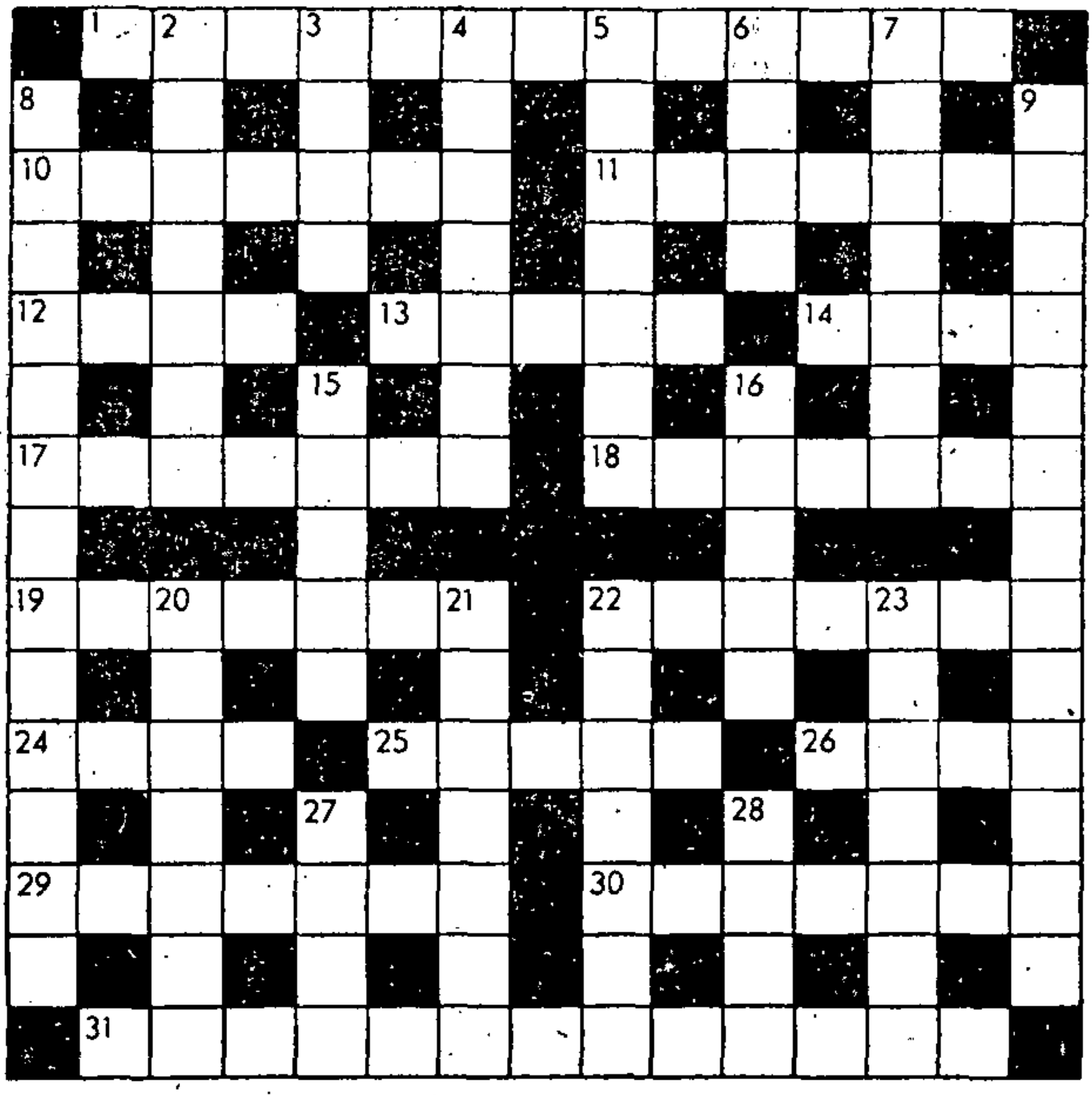
Down. 2, *Advised.* 3, *Knot.* 4, *Tuscany* 5, *Ammonia.* 6, *Dull.* 7, *Natural.* 8, *Leather-jacket.* 9, *Condescending* 15, *Bride.* 16 *Agile.* 20, *Chasten.* 21, *Wing tip* 22. *Scutage.* 23 *Angelic.* 27, *Beth.* 28, *Skye.*

ARGOSY CROSS-WORD

★

Solution on Page 143

★



CLUES

Across

1 Might be called selling plots (6, 7).

10 Grudging slash off souvenir (7).

11 Octoroon's grandparent (7).

12 Elongated match ? (4).

13 Aunt comes to tea, stays to jibe (5).

14 Goad a backward village (4).

17 Long in the tooth (7).

18 We join the angel and ring the bell (7).

19 Victim of Cardinal's curse (7).

22 Sea rescue ; T. S. Eliot's were dry (7).

24 Sour kind of catch (4)

25 Shakespeare's tinker (5).

26 Over six, of a horse (4).

29 Earnest request ends in an *outing* (7).

30 Coupled with Gath in biblical ban (7).

31 Tête-à-tête with royalty (2, 3, 8).

Down

2 Judicious, if not well or ill (7).

3 Negative sort of tie-up (4).

4 " And even the ranks of —— ". (Macaulay) (7).

5 Aim, Mona, it's gas ! (7).

6 Attribute of what killed puss (4).

7 Unaffected, certainly not sharp (7).

8 Daddy-long-legs in embryo (7-6).

9 Little Constance coming down to our level (13).

15 " The —— hath paced into the hall " (Coleridge) (5).

16 Nimble G.I. in liquor (5).

20 Sober down young Charles with ten (7).

21 Sounds like the pilot's gratuity ! (4, 3).

22 Feudal form of land-tax (7).

23 Any nice gal is (7).

27 Sister of Amy, Jo, and Meg (4).

28 Where the bonnie boat goes (4).

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